Sonnet 5 Translation

SERMONS 1

Fr. Charles-Rene Billuart

Sermons of Fr. Charles-Rene Billuart

Volume I

Translated by @*ofsaintthomas* on 𝕏

Sonnet 5 Translation

SERMONS OF THE REVEREND

CHARLES-RENÉ BILLUART

OF THE ORDER OF PREACHING FRIARS, DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY
AND AUTHOR OF THE COURSE OF THEOLOGY ENTITLED:

Summa of St. Thomas Accommodated to the Customs of Modern Academies

PUBLISHED FROM THE AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPTS, BY THE ABBÉ LELIÈVRE,

AND DEDICATED TO HIS EXCELLENCY

MGR T. M. J. GOUSSET,

Archbishop of Reims.

VOLUME ONE.

BRUSSELS,

PRINTED BY M. VANDERBORGHT, BOOKSELLER,

MARCHÉ-AUX-POULETS, 26.

1846

TO MONSEIGNEUR

THOMAS-MARIE-JOSEPH GOUSSET,

ARCHBISHOP OF REIMS, BORN LEGATE OF THE HOLY SEE,
PRIMATE OF BELGIAN GAUL, ETC., ETC.

MONSEIGNEUR,

This book, for more than one reason, ought to appear under the auspices of Your Excellency. Such was the wish both of your enlightened esteem for the author's already well-known and justly celebrated writings, and of the glorious kinship that the identity of their studies and their respective labors establishes between illustrious names; and finally, of the providential action which, in presiding over the destinies of Billuart, marked out, within the diocese of Reims, the place of his birth, the ordinary scene of his preaching, and the sanctuary where his mortal remains rest.

The homage of these sermons to Your Excellency is therefore an act of high propriety, not to say of justice. May I, in publishing them, have done a work useful to the clergy! In the meantime, so that it may manifest that intention, let it suffice for me to see them approved by a prelate worthy to be the equal of the illustrious Dominican, and distinguished, as he was, by the elevation of his character, the solidity and breadth of his learning, and by the eminent services he has rendered to sacred science.

I have the honor to be, with profound respect,

MONSEIGNEUR,

Your Excellency's

most humble and most obedient servant,

Abbé LELIÈVRE.

BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER BILLUART.

Charles-René Billuart was born at Revin, a small town in the Ardennes on the Meuse, on the 18th of January, 1685. As soon as his reason began to free itself from the clouds of childhood, his parents, equally commendable for their station and their piety, entrusted him to the Jesuits of Charleville. It was under these virtuous and skillful masters that he received his classical education. Young as he was then, a precocious maturity allowed one to glimpse what he was one day to become. He associated only with difficulty in the games of the college: the love of retreat and of study already filled his heart. Thus he had achieved in his studies a marked superiority over all his fellow students.

He had just reached his sixteenth year when, faithful to heaven's call and eagerly desiring to perfect himself in virtue and in learning, he resolved to consecrate himself to the Lord in the order of Saint Ignatius. If, on this solemn occasion, his parents showed some opposition, it was solely to test him. They respected divine Providence too much to dare thwart its designs. As for young Billuart's masters, they welcomed with joy a vocation capable of shedding new lustre on their society. They sent him at once to their novitiate at Pont-à-Mousson. Passing through Sedan, Billuart went to see the rector of the college of that town. But this Father received him with such coldness that he made him give up his design of becoming a Jesuit, without however shaking his resolve to leave the world. On his return to his native country, his first step was to throw himself at the feet of the prior of the Friars Preachers of Revin, urgently asking to take his place among the disciples of Saint Dominic.

The ardor of his wishes was satisfied. Received with heartfelt warmth, he was sent to the novitiate at Lille in 1701, and admitted to pronounce his vows the following year at the convent of Revin.

It was again at Revin that he pursued his regular course of philosophy and theology. Ordained priest in 1708 by the Bishop of Namur, he went to Liège to

complete his elementary theological studies. After studying there for two years with distinction, he was appointed professor of philosophy at Douai in 1710. The following year he was charged with the same duty at Revin, then with the teaching of theology until 1715, at which time he became master of students at Douai. That same year he published, in defense of the opinions of his order, the first of his polemical writings, all remarkable for their vigor and their aptness, but of little interest today, now that the fire of scholastic disputes has died out in the schools, giving way to a more peaceful system of study.

Distinctions ought to be the reward of merit acquired and demonstrated. As Billuart's grew from day to day, his superiors, in 1718, appointed him second regent of studies at Douai, and the following year assigned him to preach the Advent of that same year and the Lent of the following year at Liège. He had already prepared for this important mission by some early attempts at preaching in the Ardennes.

The impression made in the Low Countries by his preaching at Liège won for the preacher the honor of being called to Maastricht after Lent, to preach there before the Comte de Tilly, a zealous Catholic, governor of the town and commander-in-chief of the Dutch armies.

Billuart was to speak before a numerous audience of Catholics and Calvinists. At the Count's request, he chose for the subject of his discourse a point of Catholic doctrine on which the faith of the one party might be strengthened and the obstinacy of the other overthrown, or at least confounded. He preached on the Real Presence, on the very feast of the Blessed Sacrament, and did so with such success that the Count, filled with admiration for the power of his reasoning and the force of his eloquence, urged him, in order to make the triumph of the Roman Church still more resounding, to enter into a public discussion on the subject he had treated in the pulpit. This discussion, moreover, the ministers of the Reformed party themselves demanded,

counting on an easy victory. Billuart did not think he ought to refuse, although he was convinced that such debates were more apt to embitter minds than to give them a taste for the truth. The contest took place in the town hall, before a crowd of spectators, and the theologian there crowned the preacher's work, unveiling all the subterfuges of heresy and reducing it forcibly to silence.

The manner in which Billuart had just justified his superiors' choice, the skill he had displayed, and the glorious results he had obtained, were legitimate titles to fresh distinctions. Elected prior of the convent of Revin in 1721, he there made ecclesiastical studies flourish. The mere example of his application to work would have sufficed to inspire a love for it.

After four years of long and patient vigils and wise administration, he was called to occupy the first chair of the college of Douai, and he was about to begin his third year of duty at that establishment when he found himself raised to the office of provincial, on the 15th of October, 1728.

In his public life as in his private life, Billuart was what he shows himself to be in his writings, that is to say, equally removed from those dangerous extremes which, in the private individual, make only a vicious or unsociable man; which, in the moralist, tend only to lead consciences astray or to drive them to despair; and which, in the superior, result only in enfeebling authority or making obedience servile and sometimes intolerable. A happy blend of forbearance and firmness marked all the acts of the illustrious provincial. It was in him the fruit of that exquisite discernment which knows how to judge men and things rightly. These qualities of mind and heart, set off by an exterior full of nobility and dignity, always made him dear to his subordinates, and won him the equal esteem of bishops and of the great.

He did not take the doctor's bonnet in theology until 1729. A second Lenten course which he preached at Liège in 1732 must have made him feel that the memory of that of 1719 was far from effaced there. The crowd of hearers was

prodigious. The proof that it was deserved is found in the sermons we publish today.

When Billuart appeared again at Liège as a preacher, he was still provincial. At the expiration of that office, he became the object of a new distinction, more flattering for a scholar than any he had until then been honored with. In the assembly held at Douai in 1733 for the election of his successor, the professors of the Dominican college expressed to the new provincial their desire to see, in the schools of their province, a course of theology drawn up, as far as possible, according to the spirit of Saint Thomas. This project, having been submitted to the general of the order, was approved by him, and its execution entrusted to Father Billuart, as to the man whose sound judgment, vast learning, and proven virtue offered the necessary guarantees for rendering the sense of the Angelic Doctor and maintaining the full purity of his principles.

Nevertheless, Billuart could not immediately busy himself with the composition of this work, which was to immortalize him by placing him in the first rank among the commentators of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The cares inseparable from the various offices he exercised after the notification of this commission were the cause of the delay; but learning lost nothing thereby. The theologian perfected himself in the interval, and the eminently useful work which he later produced only became the more commendable for it.

Re-elected prior of Revin, from 1733 to 1741, Billuart continued in the Ardennes the course of his studies and his preaching. He interrupted it in 1736 to make the journey to Paris, at the invitation of the Duke of Orléans, lord of the territory of Revin. This pious and learned prince received him with singular kindness. Billuart had the honor of conversing with him on matters of scholarship, and left him, on quitting the capital, convinced that he was worthy of the reputation that had brought him there. So he returned laden with

kindnesses. The prince's continued generosity enabled him, the following year, to enlarge the buildings of his priory, and to have built there an infirmary, a hospice, and a library.

It was not until 1746, after having governed a second time as provincial, that he was able to devote himself to the composition of his course of theology. His consummate learning enabled him to complete this vast work in five years, its high value attested by numerous editions and its praise consecrated by universal vogue. The first eight volumes were dedicated to the Duke of Orléans, and the last eleven to the bishops of Ghent, Ypres, and Antwerp, and to the abbot of the monastery of Saint-Vaast at Arras. All these prelates honored the author with the most flattering approbation. The Duke of Orléans, who preferred the doctrine of Saint Thomas to all others, charmed to find so satisfying an explanation of it in Father Billuart's work, wished thenceforth to maintain with him relations of mutual intimacy. He published his Compendium in 1754, in the course of his third provincialate. He dedicated it to the general of the Dominicans, Antoine Brémond, whose full esteem he possessed, and who had often urged him to come to Rome. But the tender affection that bound Billuart to his brethren of France and Belgium always prevailed in his heart over the entreaties of his superior general. Meanwhile the weight of years and infirmities seemed to invite him to complete rest. But the fear of finding boredom in seeking comfort did not allow him to grant nature a relief that the exhaustion of his strength made necessary. Thus he was as diligent in his labors in the decline of age and under the pressure of pain as in the days of a vigorous and flourishing youth; he interrupted his work only to fortify himself, by the practices of piety, against the approach of death, and to dispose his soul to cross with confidence the threshold of eternity.

Two years passed thus, sanctified more than ever by prayer and resignation. The progressive diminution of his strength making him foresee his approaching end, he entrusted to Father Labye all his manuscripts, printed and

unpublished. Then he asked for the Holy Viaticum, which he received with the most profound sentiments of religion. After having gathered the last farewells of his brethren, and entirely forgetting the world, he occupied himself with nothing but God and His greatness until the moment when he expired (20 January 1757).

His death was as peaceful as his life had been active and laborious. Happy to have been able to join to the merit of a career usefully and gloriously filled, that of an old age purified by suffering, he faced his final hour with the calm of the just, strengthened by the memory of his sacrifices, and full of that hope which, despite the weakening of nature, produces in the heart of the dying Christian an overflowing peace and consolation.

Doubtless his labors and his virtues won for him the crown of righteousness promised to those who shall have fought a good fight; for he was as perfect a religious as he was a learned and profound theologian. His piety was solid and elevated; his humility equaled his learning. To acquire the latter, his secret was the secret of the Angelic Doctor, the secret of all who wish to sanctify and make fruitful their studies, that is, prayer joined to untiring labor. His favorite devotion was that of the Blessed Sacrament, and one may say that if the divine Master delights in remaining among us, Billuart's delight was to converse with Him. It often happened that, while his fellow religious were conversing together, he would go seek his relaxation at the foot of the altars, in the contemplation of heavenly things. A month before his death, though the worsening of his illness prevented him from celebrating the holy sacrifice, he did not fail to attend it every day, and there often received the Holy Eucharist. This burning love for Jesus Christ hidden beneath the sacred species inspired in him an ardent zeal for everything regarding divine worship. It is to his intelligent and devoted administration that the church of Revin owes most of the ornaments that adorn it, and which make it, as far as its interior is concerned, one of the most remarkable religious monuments of the region.

Sharp in dispute, Billuart was gentle and peaceable everywhere else. He himself acknowledges this somewhere in his sermons. Those who might be tempted to blame him for the active part he took in the scholastic discussions of his time should not forget that he never took the initiative, and that he most often wrote only to refute slanderous imputations directed against the opinions of his order. Cherishing the religion of Saint Dominic as a beloved son cherishes his mother, it was natural that he should take up its cause and defend it. To judge him fairly, one must therefore look back to his century, consider the spirit that then reigned in the schools, and weigh the circumstances that led Billuart to enter the arena.

The tomb of this great theologian may still be seen today in the sanctuary of the church of Revin, where he was buried. His brethren, whom he had tenderly loved, whom he had edified by his constant regularity, and governed with admirable skill, in order to perpetuate their sorrow and their gratitude, had the following inscription engraved on the white marble that covers his ashes:

HERE LIES THE REVEREND AND EMINENT FATHER
CHARLES-RENÉ BILLUART OF REVIN, ALUMNUS OF THIS CONVENT AND ITS FIFTH PRIOR, REGENT OF THE COLLEGE OF SAINT THOMAS AT DOUAI, DOCTOR OF SACRED THEOLOGY, THREE TIMES PROVINCIAL OF THE GALLO-BELGIAN PROVINCE,
A MAN RENOWNED FOR HIS WRITINGS AND HIS VIRTUES, MOST COMMENDABLE TO RELIGION AND TO THE WORLD; BUT ALAS!
HE DIED ON THE 20TH OF JANUARY, 1757, IN THE 73RD YEAR OF HIS AGE, THE 55TH OF HIS PROFESSION, AND THE 49TH OF HIS PRIESTHOOD. PRAY, YOU WHO ARE TO DIE, THAT HE MAY REST IN PEACE.

On the 6th of August, 1841, Monseigneur Gousset, Archbishop of Reims, then on a tour of his diocese, counted among the fine days of his life that on which, kneeling in the sanctuary of Revin, he was able to pray at the tomb of Father Billuart, whose learned writings he is so well able to appreciate.

PUBLISHER'S NOTICE.

Leaving it to the public to judge this work, we shall confine ourselves to establishing its authenticity. The autograph manuscripts of Billuart's sermons, before becoming our property, belonged to the library of M. Lorphelin de Fumay. This respectable layman, heir to the religious sentiments that have always distinguished his family, yielding moreover to his personal taste for monuments of local interest, kept them as a precious memento of a man who had often evangelized his parish and honored the region by the eminence of his talents and the brilliance of his virtues. They had been passed down to him by his family, who had gathered them toward the end of the last century, at the time when the library of the monastery of Revin, subjected to the influence of revolutionary fanaticism, suffered the disastrous fate of most religious libraries. Until then, Billuart's sermons had not left the convent of Revin. They had been kept there in reserve since the author's death, for the benefit of young Dominicans, whose budding talent, appropriating them by imitation, was meant to draw from them as from a happy source, one well suited to facilitate their exercise of the evangelical ministry. This original purpose is attested to us by a notice placed at the head of the first volume and signed by Father Labye, an intimate friend of Billuart and author of a Latin notice on the life and writings of the learned theologian. Here is the wording of that notice:

> "Among the various collections that I made of the manuscript works and opuscules of the Reverend Father Master Billuart, and which I have placed in our library, I thought that the one containing his sermons would be no less useful than agreeable to young preachers. I have gathered them into two volumes, just as this respectable friend entrusted them to me before his death, so that none of them might be diverted, having always kept them as the most precious pledge of his friendship and the

proof of his apostolic zeal. Make use of them, dear reader, for the glory of God, and pray to Him for the author and for his faithful collector."

F. DIEUDONNÉ LABYE,

Unprofitable Servant.

These words of Father Labye agree perfectly with what he says in the preamble of his Latin notice, already mentioned: “For I, who write these things, was for thirty years a companion of his journeys and his labors; he did not conceal from me the more secret movements of his heart, and on the eve of his death he made me the depositary of all his compositions and manuscripts. This deposit, as the last token of his friendship, and out of faithful deference to scholars, I preserve, wishing it to remain hidden from no one.”

To the authority of this twofold testimony, sufficient enough for the purpose we have in view, is added that of the inscriptions which are usually read at the beginning or end of each sermon. Some bear that of Liège, 1719-1732, the dates at which Billuart preached the Lenten course in that town; others that of Douai, where he taught theology and resided as provincial; a great many bear that of Revin, his native town, of Fumay, and of several other neighboring localities, habitually evangelized by the Dominicans of Revin.

What we have just said applies to the sermons as a whole. There are some which enjoy a special authenticity. Such are the dogmatic sermon on the Real Presence, which Father Labye mentions in his notice, and the funeral oration for Jean Billuart, dean and parish priest of Revin and cousin of the illustrious Dominican.

The authenticity of this work cannot therefore be doubted. It will be the natural complement of the writings of a man whose theological learning has

long been held in honor, and to whom nothing was lacking, in order to be well known, but to be so with respect to the direct and principal end of the institution of his order.

We must observe, in closing, that it is only a selection of sermons that we claim to offer to the clergy. We have omitted several which are but mere sketches or analyses of sermons printed prior to Father Billuart. As for those which make up these two volumes, and which are the fruit of his labor, we give them just as they exist in the autograph. We have neither retouched the style nor reworked the plans. Our whole task has been limited to suppressing several parentheses that are found in the original; and even in this we have done no more than conform to the author's intentions.

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SERMON ON THE WORD OF GOD

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

Speech, my brothers, distinguishes us from beasts hardly less than reason does, and one cannot, it seems to me, give the name of a perfect man to one who has eyes to see things, a mind to understand them, but no tongue to express them. It is the bond that maintains intercourse among mortals; without it there would be neither city nor commonwealth; without it one man is a stranger to another man, and, as the great Augustine says, the mute are scarcely more fit to form societies than beasts are.

But if the faculty of expressing our thoughts by words is one of the most beautiful and essential characteristics of natural man, the science of listening to the word of God, and of ruling our actions and thoughts by it, makes the finest distinction of the Christian man, since, at the same time that contempt for this word brings death to those who neglect it, its love gives life to those who listen to it: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Indeed, is this not that saving water which has washed the world of its corruption and which has splashed even unto eternal life? Is this not that resounding trumpet whose sound has awakened so many sinners from their criminal torpor? Is this not that sacred sword which has subjected emperors to the austere maxims of our religion, and raised the triumph of the cross upon the ruins of idolatry and cupidity? Immortal thanks be rendered to you for this, O my God: but by what mischance has it come to pass that this word, once so powerful, today produces so few effects?

Let us not seek the cause of this outside ourselves, my brothers; the contempt in which this divine word is held, the poor dispositions with which it is heard, are the great obstacles to its divine operations. To remedy this abuse, I undertake to show you the need we have to hear the word of God, and how it must be heard. I say then: it is in vain that one claims to be saved, if one does not hear the word of God; it is in vain that one hears it, if one does not bring the necessary dispositions to profit from it; that is the substance of this discourse and the subject of your attention. Ave, Maria.

FIRST POINT.

It is to save us that the eternal Word became incarnate; but it is by the temporal word that Jesus Christ has wrought our salvation. My words, He says, are spirit and life (John 6). Thus Saint Paul calls the word of God the word of salvation: Verbum salutis (Acts 13). We cannot be saved without knowing the truth; it is the word of God that makes it known to us: we cannot be saved without loving the truth; it is the word of God that makes us love it. It enlightens our mind and dispels our errors: (Augustine). It touches our heart and rectifies its movements: It is a fire that shines and warms at the same time: The word of the Lord, set ablaze. (Psalm 118).

There was a time when truth enlightened man of itself. The rays by which it shines had no need of reflection to reach his eyes, or, to speak more accurately, his eyes had no need of any aid to reach that truth. In the state of innocence, Adam's eyes were keen enough to arrive at once at the knowledge of truth without even passing through the shadows of doubt. His union with God, which made his happiness, made his knowledge as well, and truth, showing itself alone to his mind, made him see, in its unity, all the different kinds of knowledge that could make him wise and happy. But since, by his crime, he made himself unworthy of his blessedness, truth caused that luminous brightness which had enlightened him to vanish from before his

eyes, so that, truth having withdrawn and man's eyes having weakened, he now needs monitors to show him this truth on a hundred different days, in order to make him notice all its beauty, to dispel his darkness and preserve him from error. It is necessary that, on the one hand, preachers, through study and meditation, go seek this truth in the bosom of God in order to bring it near to man, and that, on the other, they arouse, by their innocent art and their discourses, the attention of their hearers, so that by this help man may see the truth and emerge from the abysses of error into which he is plunged.

Without this help, there is nothing but thick darkness, only dreadful confusion in the human mind. Everything conspires to blind and deceive him. Nature, corrupted and skillful at seduction since the Fall, hurls him into a thousand errors. There is nothing but prejudice, nothing but pretexts which it colors, which it insinuates, in place of solid truths. The revolted senses, the emboldened passions, are deceiving guides seeking only to lead him astray and to destroy him. The world, that blind world, offers nothing but falsehood and illusion in its false maxims. Your word alone, O my God, is its light and its sure guide to lead it in the paths of truth: Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum (Psalm 118). It is therefore to the ministers who announce this word to you, my brothers, that you must turn to know the truth and dispel your darkness. It is in our temples and in our holy schools that you must seek useful teachings to rule your conduct; schools authorized by the God who has chosen us and whose ambassadors we are, as the Apostle says; pure and infallible schools, since it is the Holy Spirit who inspires us through His Church, and since it is the very word of God that we announce.

There, the master learns to command, the servant to obey, the judge to dispense justice, litigants to defend their rights, fathers and mothers to govern their families, children to honor them. There, the rich man learns the use he ought to make of his wealth, the poor man the patience he ought to have in his need, the merchant the good faith he ought to have in his commerce, the

craftsman the fidelity he ought to have in his work, the ecclesiastic to honor his ministry, the religious to sanctify his retirement; in three words which sum up and comprehend everything, it is by the word of God that one learns to think as a Christian, to speak as a Christian, to act as a Christian: Useful for teaching, says Saint Paul (2 Timothy 3).

God could, it is true, instruct man by Himself or through the ministry of angels. But He has not willed to, and, in the ordinary course of His providence, He has confined Himself to His word announced by men. The centurion Cornelius indeed learns from an angel that his prayers are pleasing to God; but this angel goes no further; he sends him Saint Peter to serve as his teacher. Queen Candace's eunuch is at a loss over the meaning of a passage of Isaiah: no angel is sent to him, but the deacon Philip, to explain it to him. You know, my brothers, that it is by faith that we come to the knowledge of the truths necessary for salvation. Now, it is by the divine word announced by men that we come to faith; an express decision of the apostle Saint Paul: Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of God. How will they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10). This word is therefore necessary in order to know the truth: it is no less necessary to make us love and practice it.

I have already said, my brothers, that the word of God is not only a light that shines upon our minds, but also a fire that warms our hearts, that purifies them of their stains, consumes in them whatever is carnal, and detaches them from whatever is earthly, to fasten them solely upon God: Your word is exceedingly refined, and your servant has loved it. (Psalm 118). Every Christian is either just or a sinner. Now, whatever your state, my brothers, the word of God is necessary to make you love the truth: to you, the just, to confirm your heart in the love of truth; to you, sinners, to detach you from the love of falsehood and error, and to make you return to your God.

You are just, my brothers, I willingly grant it: but your righteousness is not something that cannot be lost; you can lose it. Your charity, however ardent it may be, can be chilled by the impetuous winds of the passions; it needs nourishment. Your virtue, however solid it may be, can weaken under the violence of temptations; it needs help. The grace that strengthens you is continually assailed by the contrary efforts of a corrupted nature; it needs support. And where can this support, this help, this nourishment be found, if not in the word of God, which, in the very words of Jesus Christ Himself, is the spiritual bread of our souls: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

But if you are sinners, how much more necessary is this word to you, to touch and convert your hearts! Nothing is more capable, according to Saint Augustine, of making an impression on the heart of a sinner than fear and hope. I mean the fear of the disastrous fruits of his sin and the hope of the great advantages of virtue. Now, is it not by means of the word of God that we announce that this fear and this hope begin to be born in a sinner's heart? We threaten an unhappy eternity that follows sin; we promise a blessed eternity attached to virtue. We intimidate by the reminder of the dreadful judgments of God; we encourage by the sight of an immortal recompense and of the most perfect felicity. What comes of this? Those punishments with which we threaten trouble and terrify the most licentious; that sovereign happiness which we promise touches even the most insensible, inspiring in the one and the other the horror of the vices which expose them to these punishments, and the love of the virtue which makes them worthy of these rewards, turning sinners into penitents.

However elevated these sinners may be by their pride, as the cedars of Lebanon are above the hyssop, this proud and imperious word will humble them beneath the almighty hand of God, will overturn them, will break them: The voice of the Lord shattering the cedars. (Psalm 28). However consumed

they may be by the impure ardors of an inveterate passion, it will cut off these dangerous flames, and will make burn for the Creator that heart which burned only for the creature: The voice of the Lord cleaving the flame of fire. (ibid.). However untractable they may be, however wild as savage beasts, it will shake them in the most secret folds of their conscience, to tame them by degrees, and render them docile to the laws of the Gospel: The voice of the Lord shaking the desert. (ibid.). However timid they may be as deer, cowardly in carrying out the resolutions they have so many times made to give themselves to God, it will destroy in them all the obstacles of that fear and that imaginary shame; it will prepare them, it will help them, it will bring them to bring forth a spirit of salvation: The voice of the Lord prepareth the stags. (ibid.).

Consult, my brothers, the oracles of Scripture, search through the experience of every age, and you will never find that men have come out of the darkness of sin to follow the lights of grace by any other way than that of the word of God. Adam sins: the voice of God making itself heard in paradise makes him feel his fault; he obtains pardon. David abandons himself to the utmost disorders: Nathan, sent by God, reproaches him for his crime, and makes of him a model of penitence. Saul persecutes the Christians: a thunderous voice overthrows him and makes him the apostle of the nations. Magdalen is a public sinner: the words of the divine Master touch her and make of her an illustrious penitent. Finally, was it not by the ministry of the word that God destroyed the monsters of paganism, overturned the altars of idols, converted the nations, and sanctified the world? Is it credible, then, my brothers, that He should employ other means for you, and follow other laws of providence than those He has established?

Would it not be presumption to claim such extraordinary privileges? Conclude, then, with me, that the word of God is necessary to you, both to know the truth and to love it; and consequently, to save you. That is what I

had to prove to you. But this truth being granted, allow me, my brothers, to rise up here against the negligence of so many Christians in hearing the word of God. This moral does not concern most of my hearers, whose diligence I should rather commend than reprove their negligence. But I entreat them to serve as preachers themselves to others, and to pass on to the absent what I am about to say. In some, the pretext of business; in others, the pretext of health; the pretext of self-sufficiency in the listener; the pretext of incapacity in the preacher. In short, what is not sought, what is not said, to excuse oneself from coming to hear the word of God?

The pretext of business. I have too many entanglements, says this merchant: a family to raise, an account to settle, a bargain to conclude, a lawsuit to pursue; I have not the time to remain so long in churches. Oh, how unreasonable you are, my friend! You find time to attend to your temporal affairs, and you find none to work for your salvation! You find time to damn yourself, and you find none to save yourself! What blindness!

The pretext of health. My constitution is delicate, my health is weak; the air of the church is unhealthy, it inconveniences me. What! ladies, you who ordinarily spend hours, days, and nights in worldly conversations, at gaming, at balls, at the theater, and can scarcely remain half an hour in church to hear the word of God! A frivolous and extravagant excuse. The pretext of self-sufficiency. I know my duty, one says, I am sufficiently instructed. The preacher tells us nothing new. — But, my friend, it is not always a question of teaching a Christian what he does not know: it is a question of making him reflect on what he knows. David knew better than Nathan the sin he had committed. Yet it was necessary that this prophet, after an ingenious parable, say to him: It is you yourself, David, it is you yourself who are that man you wish to punish. — We tell you nothing new! Ah, if you continually commit the same disorders, why do you want us to preach other truths to you? No, my brothers, so long as you continue to be unchaste, adulterous, drunken,

blasphemers, slanderers, I shall continue to tell you, with Saint Paul, that neither the unchaste, nor adulterers, nor drunkards, nor blasphemers, nor slanderers shall ever enter the kingdom of heaven. The pretext of the preacher's incapacity. It is not precisely the word of God that I despise, one says, but it is the poor manners of the preacher. He is coarse in his expressions, too carried away in his zeal, too severe in his morality; he always alarms us, never consoles us. That is to say, my brothers, that you want preachers who preach to you politely and agreeably: politely with respect to your ideas, agreeably with respect to your taste; preachers whose conceptions are subtle, whose divisions are exact, whose composition is studied, whose terms are choice, whose periods are rounded, whose style is flowery, whose gestures are measured, whose zeal is moderate; preachers who tickle your ears but spare your heart. But do you know, my brothers, that it is of God, as Saint Paul says, and not of men, that we hold our Gospel, and that consequently we must preach it, not according to the fashion of men, but according to the designs of God? Now God, says the apostle, wills to save men, not by studied and elaborate discourses, but by the humility and simplicity of preaching: It pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. (1 Corinthians 1). No, my brothers, no, we do not call you to the sermon to learn to speak well, but to teach you to live well; not to divert your mind there, but to convert your heart there.

The preacher, you say, is too carried away in his zeal, too severe in his morality; he never consoles us, he always alarms us. What! my brothers, we see nearly all the marks of ancient Christianity effaced, we see nothing but impurities in marriages, nothing but corruption in families, nothing but excesses among the young, nothing but infidelities in commerce, nothing but injustices among judges, nothing but debauchery among the people, and after that you find it wrong that a preacher grows impassioned! One wants to pass off today impiety and libertinism as strength of mind, oaths and blasphemies

as an ornament of language, the frenzy of continual gambling as an honest occupation, impurity as gallantry, usury as charity, and after that you ask: Why so much crying out! We see on every side a God despised by His creatures, the blood of Jesus Christ trampled underfoot, so many souls redeemed by it hurling themselves by the thousand into the fires of hell, and you ask us why we cry out! Ah, my brothers, if you want us to change our manner of preaching, in order to preach to the taste and fashion of worldly people, take from our hands three things: the crucifix, the Gospel, and the example of the saints. After that, we shall use figures, we shall make antitheses, we shall round our periods, we shall choose our words, our zeal will be moderate, our style flowery and polished. But so long as I see a crucifix, that is, a God covered with wounds and blood; so long as I read in the Gospel that heaven suffers violence, that if your eye scandalizes you, you must pluck it out; that unless one does penance, one shall perish; so long as I see the saints sweating, laboring, weeping, groaning, afflicting themselves, and, after so innocent a life, still trembling at the mere thought of the judgments of God; so long as I see all that, I shall not be able to keep myself from telling you, and telling you with all the zeal that God inspires in me, without evasion and without figure: In truth, sinners, in truth, you are damning yourselves, or this crucifix is not the image of the predestined, or the Gospel deceives us, or the saints are in error.

Finally, Father, let the preacher himself do what he preaches, and after that we shall go and hear him. — That is your last retrenchment, negligent hearers of the word of God; but it is perhaps the weakest. That the preacher does not do what he says is indeed what condemns him, but it is not what justifies you. Would you refuse to receive baptism from his hand because he is a sinner? Why then would you refuse to hear the word of God from his mouth, because he does not fulfill it?

Ah, if you knew, you who neglect to hear the word of God, and who perhaps despise it, if I could say to you, as the Savior of the world said to the Samaritan woman: If you knew the gift of God! (John 4), if you knew how precious this gift is, how inestimable this benefit, you would not seek so many pretexts to excuse yourselves from hearing it. Alas, how many vast countries there are where the truths that God announces to you through the mouth of His ministers are unknown! How many millions of men in idolatrous lands who have never heard of our mysteries! Who could have induced God to give you so liberally what He refuses to so many others? Why does He leave them in their fatal blindness, while He makes all His light shine before your eyes? If you knew the gift of God! Ah, if you truly understood that this divine word is the necessary means, the efficacious principle of your salvation, the first token of friendship that God grants, the mark of a predilection He has had for you for all eternity, and perhaps the last effort of His mercy, would you neglect it, as you do, this word of salvation, this singular favor, this so favorable an occasion? But is it enough to hear the word of God in order to be saved? No. It must further be heard with suitable dispositions in order to profit from it.

SECOND POINT.

The word we announce to you is the word of God and not our own; it is, moreover, as I have told you, a means of salvation and of sanctification. From this I discover two dispositions with which we must hear it. For if it is the word of God, we must attend to it with respect, and if it is a means of salvation, we must hear it with docility and with a true desire to profit from it. Renew your attention.

Hear, Israel, God often said to His people, hear, audi Israel. Why, Lord? Because it is I who speak to you, ego Dominus. When one is well persuaded of this truth, my brothers, when one firmly believes that preachers are the organs of God, that they are His interpreters, His envoys, His ambassadors;

that it is through them that He explains Himself and publishes His law; in a word, that the word they announce is the word of God, one easily concludes that one must hear it with respectful attention.

It is the word of God: what a character of excellence and greatness! For if we distinguish a character of majesty in the words of kings, of administration in those of politicians, of authority in those of legislators, of learning in those of scholars, of equity in those of judges, of goodness in those of fathers, of sincerity in those of friends—these different characters, which make them so dear and so venerable to us, disappear and fade away when one compares them to your word, O my God, before which the sincerity of friends is but venality, the goodness of fathers but blind love, the learning of scholars but ignorance, the authority of legislators but weakness, the penetration of politicians but error, the equity of judges but a feeble trickle from your own, the majesty of kings but a small spark escaped from your infinite greatness. — Faithful people, gathered here, listen then with respect to this word of your God: Hear, O Israel; I am the Lord.

When Ezra opened for the first time the book of the law, which had been found in the temple after the return from captivity, all the people prostrated themselves face to the ground to hear it, and at the first word this pontiff pronounced, all hearts opened, all eyes melted into tears, and the groaning was such that the Levites were obliged to call for silence. Who inspired in them so religious an attention, so profound a respect? It was the minister of God whom they revered as God Himself. It was the word of God that they received from the mouth of Ezra: They bowed down and worshipped, prostrate on the ground; all the people were weeping. (2 Esdras 8).

Great God, what cause for condemnation for so many Christians who so unworthily treat your holy word, who hear it as the word of a man, without attention, without respect! It is thus that you treat it, libertines, who appear

before us with nothing but scattered airs, wandering eyes, laughter, gestures, mutual signals, careless and indecent postures; who attend the sermon only to be seen there, sometimes even, dare I say it, and will you not be scandalized at it, to satisfy a brutal passion by the sight of an object you cannot see elsewhere at your ease. It is thus that you treat it, worldly girls and women, who come to the sermon adorned and dressed as if for a ball or a play; who seem to show yourselves in our holy assemblies only to hold your own against the preacher, and to preach for Satan at the same time that we preach for Jesus Christ; who, in Tertullian's phrase, come to set up a pulpit of pestilence against a pulpit of truth; and, while the preacher teaches humility, modesty, contempt of the world, preach to all who see you pride, luxury, and love of the age: An adorned woman is a platform for refined lust. It is thus that you treat it, so-called freethinkers, who mock the most terrible truths we announce to you, and who listen to them as if we were telling you fables, like the sons-in-law of Lot who laughed at the threats he made them of the coming destruction of Sodom: And he seemed to them to be speaking in jest. (Genesis 19).

Your word, O my God, has the same fate you yourself had among men. You were God, and you were taken for nothing but a man: we announce your divine word, and it is taken for a human word, it is treated, it is despised, as the word of man. But do you know, my brothers, that God is no less jealous of the honor of His word than of the honor of His own body: The Word of God is no less than the Body of Christ, says Saint Augustine. During the Passion of Jesus Christ, His body is mistreated, torn, crucified: He keeps silence, and far from complaining of His executioners, He prays for them. But as soon as He is accused of having spoken ill, He makes His defense, He takes up the defense of His word, He justifies it: If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong. (John 18). It is therefore true, as Saint Augustine says, that His word is no less dear to Him than His body, and that you are scarcely less

guilty in treating it without respect than in profaning His sacred body: Non minus est, etc. Thus He threatens with all His indignation those who despise it. They have announced my word to them, He says through His prophet: they have rejected it, they have despised it. That is why I am full of fury, my anger is kindled and my heart altogether inflamed: The word of the Lord has come to them, and they will not accept it; therefore, I am full of fury. (Jeremiah 6).

Listen to it then with respect, my brothers, this divine word, since it is the word of God and He is jealous of it. Listen to it also with docility, because it is a means of salvation: that is the second disposition. I have already told you, my brothers, and it is true, that the word of God is a word of sanctification and of salvation. But whatever virtue it has, it will not sanctify us and will not save us without us. It is, according to the parable of the Gospel, the good seed: The seed is the word of God. (Luke 8). Now, however good the seed may be, it will always remain fruitless if the field that receives it is not prepared. Do you wish this good seed to produce a hundredfold, and this divine word to sanctify you? Prepare the field of your heart by prayer and recollection, by humility, by an ardent desire to profit from it. Ask God for that docility of heart which Solomon asked of Him: You will give your servant a docile heart. (1 Kings 3). Listen to it as Samuel listened to it, when God, having called him, he answered: Speak, Lord, for your servant hears. Not only am I attentive to the orders you wish to give me, but I am also fully disposed to carry them out, and it is for this that I ask to hear them: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. (1 Samuel 3).

But how far we are from these happy dispositions! This precious seed that we scatter most often finds only stony and arid ground, where its sprouting germ withers away, or public roads where passers-by trample it underfoot, or thorns and brambles which choke it. Son of man, God says to Ezekiel, I hear my people every day speaking of you and your discourses; they say to one another: Let us go hear this preacher, let us see what he will tell us today:

Come, and let us hear what word goes forth from the Lord. (Ezekiel 33). They come in crowds into the temple, as if they were entering it in truth, but they do not enter in truth: they take their place in your audience, but do not think, prophet, that they are there. If you intend to divert them, they are there in spirit; if you intend to convert them, they are not there in heart: They come to you as if a people were entering. (ibid.). Notice this expression, my brothers, they enter as if they were entering, that is to say, that they are at the sermon only in body and at most in mind. They are with their whole heart in their intrigues, in their affairs, in their games, their amusements, in a word, in the different objects of their passions.

Prophet, the Lord continues, they hear well enough what you tell them on my behalf, but they do nothing about it, because they listen to the truths you preach to them as they would listen to a piece of music: They listen to your words but do not act upon them, because they turn them into a song of their own mouths. (ibid.). Do you not recognize yourselves, my brothers, in this portrait so exact that God Himself draws for His prophet of the bad hearers of His word? How many times have you not come into our temples and to our sermons as to a profane declamation, with no other design than to satisfy an idle curiosity which brings you there, to follow the crowd which draws you there, to comply with a certain custom which prompts you, without knowing well either how or why? How many times have you come there with no other view than to pass a time that would weary you elsewhere, to criticize the preacher who speaks to you, or to study his style, his turn of phrase, and his manner! How many times have you come there out of mere human respect! Have you ever come as penitents, full of recollection and compunction, to hear the holy truths as salutary reproaches? Have you ever come there sighing under the tyranny of your passions, to obtain deliverance from it? What am I saying? Have you not often come there with the deliberate will to resist the

impressions that the truths, whose memory you willingly lose and which you never think of without pain, might make upon you?

But what will come of this, my brothers? I fear to say it; but can I keep silent without betraying my ministry? This word which you abuse will harden you and will condemn you. It will harden you: witness Pharaoh, who hardened himself the more he resisted the voice of God speaking to him through that of Moses. It will condemn you: witness those terrible anathemas fulminated by Jesus Christ against the inhabitants of Bethsaida and Chorazin, who had not wished to be converted at the voice of His preaching and His miracles. It will rise up against you on the day of judgment, it will accuse you, it will demand justice for all the abuses you shall have made of it, and God, who was always faithful to it, will render it to it whole. You could have saved yourselves, He will say to you, and you did not do it; the way was shown you, you did not take it; you were given advice, you did not follow it. You have heard declaimed a hundred times against your disorders, you did not come out of them. What excuse will you allege then, my brothers? Would it not have been better for you never to have heard the word of God at all than to have heard it so often without practicing it? Ah, Lord, shall I then have mounted so many times into this pulpit only to contribute to the loss and condemnation of these souls which I ought to have saved by my ministry! Do not permit it, O my God! If my voice is too weak, make your blood speak, make your grace act: let it touch them, let it convert them, and make them worthy of the happiness promised to those who hear your word and who practice it. Amen.

SERMON ON SALVATION

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: hear him. (*Matthew 17.*)

We can no longer be surprised, my brothers, by strange doctrines. Here is the Master par excellence whom God Himself commands us to hear. He cannot err; He is His beloved Son, He is His Word, He is the splendor of His substance, He is the light of His light; in short, He is truth itself, He is our life and our way. He who follows Him does not walk in darkness; he who attaches himself to Him does not fall; he who listens to Him does not go astray.

But what does He come to teach us? Salvation, my brothers, and the ways to attain it. Everything He said, everything He did, comes to that. His Gospel proclaims nothing else, and everywhere He cries aloud that salvation is the only necessary thing, that all the rest is but vanity and illusion: Furthermore, one thing is necessary. (Luke 10). Listen then, my brothers, to this divine Master; profit from His lessons; seriously set your hand to the task, and do not neglect this great affair: that is what I come to exhort you to today.

Observe, my brothers, that two circumstances oblige us to work seriously at an affair: its importance and its uncertainty. When an affair is grave and involves liberty, honor, or life; when the right is doubtful and one has strong opposing parties, and even appearances and prejudices pointing to an unfavorable outcome, there is no care that one does not take, no pains that one does not give oneself, no recommendation that one does not seek, no friend one does not employ. Now what affair, my brothers, do we have that is more important and more uncertain than that of our salvation? We could have none, of whatever nature it might be, whose importance is greater and whose outcome is more doubtful.

Let us explain, my brothers, these two things in the two parts of this discourse, and let us show that one cannot work with too much care at the affair of one's salvation, because everything is at stake in it: that will be my first part; because everything is to be feared in it: that will be my second. Ave, Maria.

FIRST POINT.

The lights of reason alone suffice to make us understand that the importance of an affair ought to be the measure of the care one must take of it. The same prudence that distinguishes our true interests from our apparent interests also distinguishes the less important from the more considerable. It naturally leads us to defend honor more warmly than life, life more than goods, our whole fortune more than a part of these goods. Great affairs are treated seriously; one trifles with small ones. It is pardonable for a man to neglect a lawsuit that can have no unfortunate consequences; but he would not be excusable for neglecting one in which his whole fortune would be at stake. This rule is never more true than when it concerns salvation; we have nothing more precious, and it ought to be dearer to us than everything else. An affair becomes important on two counts: first, by the greatness of the goods it procures for us, if it succeeds; second, by the gravity of the evils it brings upon us, if it does not succeed. Thus an affair that concerns the establishment of an entire family, or its total ruin, passes in the world for an affair of the utmost importance. Now, if we follow this principle to judge the importance of the affair of salvation, we shall soon agree that it is the most important of our affairs, that everything is at stake in it, and we shall easily conclude that we ought to neglect nothing in it.

What is at stake, Christians, in the affair I speak to you of? What gain do you make if you save yourselves? Learn it, my brothers: you gain infinite goods, and such, says the apostle, that eye has never seen, ear has never heard, nor mind ever conceived their equal: Nor has it entered into the heart of man. (1 Corinthians 2). You gain goods that surpass all the desires of man, adds Saint Augustine: They transcend vows and desires; goods that you can merit and acquire, but that you cannot sufficiently esteem: Acquiri possunt, aestimari non possunt. You gain goods that are pure, through the removal of everything that could alter them; entire, through the assembly of everything that can perfect them; eternal, through that duration which nothing should ever end:

goods, continues Saint Augustine, so excellent and so exalted that, whatever price you give to purchase them, one can always say that they cost you nothing, so far are they above what they cost you: It is given for free, when what is being bought is so great.

You gain goods that have all the advantage of desire without seeing its evil, and all the fruits of fullness without feeling its pain. Let me explain. The evil of desire is the privation of what one wishes and the fear of not being able to obtain it; the evil of fullness is the disgust with what one possesses and of which one soon tires. The good of desire is hope; the good of fullness is satiety and peace. Now, in the goods of heaven, in these goods that you gain by saving yourselves, there is hope without anxiety and satiety without disgust. One is always sated with what one desires, and one always desires what one possesses: The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. (Augustine).

What more shall I say? You gain goods that are the price of the very blood of Jesus Christ, goods in which the Lord takes pleasure in displaying His magnificence, and in which He finds Himself, in all His divinity, His entire felicity. In a word, in saving yourselves, it is a question of the dearest interests of your soul, of acquiring an immortal glory, the sight and enjoyment of God. And one would have to be ignorant of what a soul is worth, of what price an immortal glory is, of what the enjoyment of God is, not to understand the importance of salvation, which encompasses all these great goods. Add that it is not only a matter of the loss of all these goods: however great they may be, and however painful their privation might be, one might perhaps resolve to lose them. As the desire one would have had to possess them would not have been very great, the sadness of having lost them would perhaps not be very keen. But this affair is of such a nature that if the gain is all one can hope for, the loss of that gain is not all one must fear.

Not to make one's salvation, to lose an eternal felicity, is to fall at the same time into the most frightful of all miseries, it is to plunge into countless evils, insupportable by their rigor, eternal, with no hope of ever seeing them end. It is in a place of torment that your lot must be, if heaven is not your reward. It is there that the sinners of the earth, in the prophet's phrase, drink to the dregs the fury and the indignation of God without ever being able to exhaust it. Everything will contribute to their torment: the past, the present, and the future: the past, an inexhaustible source of regrets, will tear at them; the present, accompanied by a thousand sorrows, will overwhelm them; the future, without term and without resource, will make them despair. And it is a question, my brothers, in making your salvation, of avoiding these frightful destinies. It is, so to speak, between two eternities that you walk, one blessed, the other unhappy. The affair of your salvation consists in the choice you have made of one or the other, in the means you take to merit the one and to avoid the other. A necessary choice: understand, if you please, my thought. There are affairs in the world in which one might engage, but in which one is also free not to enter at all, and in which the wisest indeed remain neutral. But here there is no middle ground: one must decide, one must win or lose. It is an indispensable affair; life is given to us only to think of it. A merchant can remain quietly in port and not expose himself to shipwreck. One can, in a lawsuit, so arrange things between two parties that there is neither loss nor advantage on either side. One can, in a battle, leave success so uncertain that there are neither victors nor vanquished. But with regard to salvation, with regard to the soul, there is no accommodation: one must be either crowned in heaven or reproved in hell; happy eternally if I keep it, that soul so dear to me, if I preserve it from the snares and the fury of the enemy who seeks to snatch it from me; unhappy eternally if it is taken from me. I have only that one, and, as David says, it is my only one. After a loss of this nature, I have nothing more to hope for either in this life or in the next.

Such is the importance of your salvation, my brothers: understand it well; and in order to impress it more firmly upon you, in order to put it into a perspective you may never quit, unite this double idea of good and evil, of eternal happiness and misfortune, and weigh carefully these terms: the soul, eternity, heaven, hell! The soul, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ; eternity, immense, infinite, and unchangeable; God, altogether lovable and almighty, altogether good and altogether admirable; heaven, that fulfillment of every desire, that assemblage of every good, that composite of glory, of pleasure, of rest, and of riches, that masterpiece of the magnificence of God; hell, that abyss, that frightful gulf where one hears nothing but howling and blasphemy, whence hope is banished, where an eternal horror reigns. Gather now these different ideas together, make but one of them, of the dignity of the soul, of the duration of eternity, of the greatness of God, of the excellence of glory and the pains of hell, and understand that your salvation contains all that, and that it is a matter, in working at it, of securing the happiness of the soul, of making oneself a blessed eternity, of meriting the possession of God, of acquiring glory, of winning heaven, of avoiding hell. Oh, how important such an affair is, and how true it is to say that everything is at stake in it!

What good does it do a man to succeed in his other affairs if he loses this one; and, to express myself in the very terms of Jesus Christ, what would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Let this world perish, let it perish, cries Saint Augustine, provided I be not lost! Let the world's profit perish, so that the soul suffer no loss! Losing the world, I remain to myself and can still be happy. Gaining the world and losing myself, nothing remains to me and I can be only wretched. Riches amassed with such care, of what use are you to me if I lose myself? I might have had all the treasures of the world, but I could not thereby ransom my soul: What exchange will a man give for his soul? (Matthew 16)? Pleasures pursued with such passion, of what use are you to me if I lose myself? The more sweetness you have had, the more

bitterness you will cause me. Greatness, power, elevation, favor, establishment, position, fortune, friends, children, of what use are you to me if I lose myself? What you have of brilliance and flattery will vanish, and nothing will remain but the displeasure of having done everything for you and nothing for myself.

If then everything that is good in the world is so useless to whoever does not make his salvation, no, I have not said enough when I said that salvation was the most important of our affairs; I ought to add, with Saint Eucher, that it was our only affair: Let these things occupy us now—no longer as the first priority, but as the only one. After having said that everything was at stake, I ought to add: and elsewhere nothing is at stake. Now, does not prudence require, my brothers, that so important an affair occupy all our care, and that our salvation, being more precious than all the rest, be preferred to everything? Yet this is not how most men act. Wholly occupied with the goods of this life, enamored of the false pleasures of the world, they sell, they lose, they pawn or give away their souls.

There is, says Saint Augustine, between the demon and the sinner a kind of commerce: the sinner sells his soul, the demon buys it, and gives in payment the sweetness of a passing pleasure. Ah, sinner, this commerce is not just. The soul is of infinite price; temporal goods are of almost no value. But, alas! you do not look at it so closely; you treat the price of your soul as Judas treated the price of his Master; you sell it wretchedly for a moment's pleasure, for an interest of nothing. Blasphemers, slanderers, envious ones, you do not sell your soul, but, what is worse, you give it away. For, my brothers, is it not to give away one's soul to lose it for a blasphemy uttered without pleasure, for an envy that brings no profit, for a slander that produces only shame and displeasure at having spoken it?

In a word, worldly people, men of intrigue, men of business and commerce, fathers and mothers, you sell and you lose your soul, giving all your time to the establishment of your family and the advancement of your children, finding none to work at your salvation. Unjust appraisers of things, who burden yourselves with those that are foreign or superfluous to you, and who neglect those that ought to be dearest to you, blind and senseless, you damn yourselves in order to amass wealth for heirs who perhaps already wish to see you in your grave so as to enjoy your spoils; you will leave them in splendor and pomp, while you yourselves go to suffer torments and to burn in flames. Ah, my brothers, if you had the eyes of faith, or even those of reason sufficiently purified, you would blush at your conduct, you would cry out with Solomon, and you would have more reason to say it than he: Stultissimus sum virorum (Proverbs 30), I am the most foolish and the most blind of all men. I am taken for a man of intelligence; people believe me able and well-versed in the knowledge of affairs; but when it comes down to it, when I come to examine what I am and what I do, I am compelled to admit there is no folly to equal mine: I am the most foolish of men. I manage other people's affairs well, and I forget my own interests; I establish my family, I settle my children, and I give myself over entirely to that. But what will become of me meanwhile, myself, what will be my destiny, not so much in this life as in the other? What will become of my soul? That is what, until now, I have paid not the least attention to, though it is my most important and my only affair: I am the most foolish of men. Christians who hear me, do not fall into this error, or if by misfortune you have already fallen into it, get out of it as soon as possible. Do not be so wise for others that you neglect your own principal affair. When one is truly wise, one is wise for oneself: If you are wise, you will be wise for yourself. (Proverbs 9). Have charity for others, and especially for those close to you; but do not lack it for yourself. Think of your fortune; but think much more of your salvation: regard it as an important affair in which everything is

at stake, you have just seen this, and as an uncertain affair in which everything is to be feared: that remains for me to demonstrate.

SECOND POINT.

If the affair of your salvation were important without being difficult, one could make it succeed without giving oneself much trouble. If it were only difficult without being important, one might let it fail without deserving much blame. But it is at once difficult and important, and as one cannot apply oneself to it too seriously because of its importance, one cannot work at it with too much precaution because of its difficulty. In vain do we flatter ourselves with the rights we have to heaven, those rights founded on the reason for our creation, on the price of our redemption, on the graces of our baptism, on our alliances with Jesus Christ, on the interest He takes in saving us. All these titles do not prevent the affair of our salvation from being uncertain, and from our having great cause to work at it with fear, as the great apostle counseled. The difficulties that render our salvation uncertain are so great that I know not, my brothers, whether I shall be able to describe them without diminishing them. Shall I say that man is like a sick person who would walk by night upon a slippery slope, surrounded by precipices and hemmed in by enemies who make every effort to make him fall? This idea is natural enough. Man is weak, he is sick; the world is a slippery path; sin and hell are precipices that surround him, and the demons strive to drag him down with them: "Their way is like a slippery path in the darkness," says the prophet Jeremiah; "they shall be thrust forward and fall." (Jeremiah 23). Shall I add that a vessel open on every side and buffeted by the winds runs no less risk upon a sea agitated by a raging storm? Scripture often makes use of this image. It compares the world to the sea, and man to a vessel sailing upon this sea. The vessel is open on every side: the water of iniquity enters it in a thousand places. It meets reefs at every moment: these are the occasions of

sin. It is exposed to the assaults of pirates: these are the demons. The passions are impetuous winds that carry it away and make it either founder in the depths or be dashed against the rocks: They plunge into destruction, says Saint Paul (1 Timothy 6).

Alas, my brothers, how shipwreck is to be feared amid so perilous a voyage, and how imprudent one would have to be to fear nothing in the midst of so many dangers! However vivid these images of the uncertainty of our salvation may be, I confess that they represent but imperfectly how doubtful the outcome is. To conceive all that one ought to fear in it, one would need to know, first, the natural opposition we have to the means of salvation; second, the obstacles that the demons bring to it, whom one may call our adverse parties in this great affair; and finally, the little time given us to attend to it. To save oneself, one must live in a body as if one were all spirit, be of this world and not follow its maxims, use the goods one possesses and not love them, renounce pleasure or enjoy it without attachment. To save oneself, one must tame violent passions, mortify disordered senses, tear out inveterate habits, flee objects at once agreeable and fatal, avoid dangerous occasions, do violence to one's gentlest inclinations, love one's enemies, hate oneself, carry one's cross and follow Jesus Christ. And which of you, my brothers, can answer that he faithfully acquits himself of these duties? Are we not, alas, subject to a law of the body opposed to the law of the spirit? Has not the corruption of nature spoiled our hearts? Do we not have a secret inclination to pleasure? Is not the lower part which makes up half of ourselves entirely corrupted and vitiated, is it not wholly inclined to evil, does it not have secret understandings with the demons, our enemies? It agrees with them, it is always ready to declare itself in their favor and to take their side, delivering us into their hands.

Saint Bernard adds that the demons found their hope of destroying us principally on this understanding they have with half of ourselves. They rely

less on their own powers, he says, than on the help they expect from the flesh, because a domestic enemy is always the most dangerous.

But, my brothers, even were they without this help, are they not capable, of themselves, of making us apprehend that the success of an affair they oppose might not be happy? They have malice and strength. Their malice animates their power, and their power sustains their malice. Powerful enough to conquer us, malicious enough to overthrow us, let us suppose nevertheless that the demons have no other part in the affair of our salvation than to produce against us, on the day of judgment, the pieces that condemn us, and to place in the balance of divine justice our vices against our virtues. Must one not admit that the comparison of these pieces which condemn us with those which justify us, of our vices with our virtues, renders the outcome of this affair not only uncertain, but almost desperate?

What can we allege in our favor, and what can the demon not produce against us? Virtues and good works are the only things that make the goodness of our cause and that can make us win it. But what good works have we done, what virtues have we practiced? Perhaps in our whole life we have not done a single action that self-love has not tainted, that vanity has not spoiled, and that some other faults have not rendered more worthy of punishment than of reward. Perhaps we have not practiced a single virtue that deserves the name. Your humility has perhaps been but disguised pride, your gentleness but cowardly and timid complaisance, your zeal but passion or ill humor. The demon can, on the contrary, produce against us an infinite number of sins, committed with reflection, out of malice and premeditated design. He can produce criminal desires, unjust thoughts, unwise words, and indecent actions. He can produce those crimes that a bold malice made us commit in public, and those sins that a more timid malice made us commit in secret. He can produce those of which we have been the authors and those of which we have been the accomplices and the witnesses. Yet we shall be judged on these

pieces, so different and so unequal. I saw the dead, great and small, appear before God, says Saint John, in his Apocalypse. Two books were opened, and another book was opened, which was the book of life, and the dead were judged according to what was written in these books, according to their works. In these books are written the sins we have committed. In this unique and small book are written the virtues we have practiced. Several books are needed to contain our crimes, because their multitude is almost infinite. Only one is needed to contain all our virtues, because their number is very small. These, however, my brothers, are the different pieces that will serve for our trial. That is what will decide it. Do we not then have cause to fear, we who know that, having committed so many sins, we have done so few good works? Add to this that there are already pronounced verdicts, which may pass for prejudgments of our future condemnation, and which the demon will not fail to produce against us: for I note two kinds of verdicts in the condemnation of sinful man. Some have been pronounced by the law, and others will be pronounced by Jesus Christ, that sovereign judge, who is at once the author and the guardian of the law. These two kinds of verdicts will be entirely in conformity with each other. The judge will condemn what the law has condemned, and the law has condemned what the judge will condemn. Woe to you, rich, because you have your consolation in this world: Woe to you rich, for you have your consolation. (Luke 6). There is the verdict pronounced by the law. Depart from me, accursed, go into the eternal fire; I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. There is the verdict that will be pronounced by Jesus Christ, author and avenger of the law. Nothing is more alike than these two verdicts. The first is the prejudgment of the second; the second is the confirmation of the first. Thus whoever is condemned by the law is in danger of one day being condemned by Jesus Christ. And how many among us, my brothers, are already condemned by the law! It condemns hypocrites: perhaps we all are such. It condemns those who give scandal: perhaps we have often

been an occasion of stumbling and scandal. It condemns drunkards: how many are there not among you! It condemns the unchaste: how few chaste people there are in the world! Search, my brothers, search your hearts, and tremble at the sight of so great an uncertainty regarding your salvation, and of the manifest peril in which you stand of one day being condemned by Jesus Christ, being already condemned by the law. It is true that there is this difference between the verdicts that Jesus Christ will pronounce and those the law has already pronounced: that being condemned by the former, one is irrevocably condemned, whereas the law condemns us only for as long as we transgress it. It leaves to penance the time to be able to overturn its verdicts. But how important it is to do penance promptly! One will not always have the time to do it. That is the last circumstance which increases the uncertainty of our salvation. I would forgive Christians their negligence regarding the affair of their salvation, if they were assured of being able one day to work at it effectively. But nothing is more uncertain than that future they promise themselves, and, as the holy Fathers say, there is no greater folly than to await the uncertain extremities of a life that can end at any moment, in order to work at an affair in which an eternity is at stake. What is it to defer the care of one's salvation? It is to put it off to another time. To put it off to another time is to dispose of the time to come, and to dispose of time to come is to be dangerously deceived. Is time yours, my brothers? Are you masters of it, to dispose of it thus? Is it a fund that belongs to you, on which to build hopes of living until the term you have set for yourselves? Speak, oracles of truth, speak, divine Jesus, and disabuse these rash ones: It is not for you to know the times and moments which the Father has placed in his own authority. (Acts 1). Note it well, presumptuous ones, says Saint Bernard, it is in God's power that time lies, and not in yours: In sua potestate. Why then do you claim to dispose of it as if it were yours? Why do you presume about the future, you wretched man?

The time to come is not mine, you will say, I admit it; but I believe that God will grant it to me. Who told you so, my brothers? Has God promised it to you? Where is that promise written? It is true that He has promised pardon to your penitence. But has He promised you the time to do that penance? If He has not promised it to you, how do you dare to be assured of it? Do you not know that the hour of death is uncertain; that from life to death there is but a single step to take; that this step can be taken in a moment? Are you ignorant that the property of death is to take by surprise, and that it comes all at once, like a thief, when one thinks of it least, according to the very words of Jesus Christ Himself? In six months, you say, I will work seriously at my salvation. Well, my friend, are you assured of living six months? — It will be at Easter; and what if there is no Easter for you! — It will be in eight days; and what if for you there are but three! — Tomorrow, then, the end of my debaucheries: and what if this very day is the end of your life! — Ah, I do not believe I shall die so soon. It is for that very reason that you ought to fear, since death comes when it is thought most distant, when one thinks of it least: At an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come. (Luke 12). And the moment it arrives will be the one that decides your lot for a blessed or an unhappy eternity.

It is not difficult for litigants, whose cause is bad and whose right is doubtful, to gain time and to obtain delay. Credit and chicanery can make a lawsuit last several years that one could finish in a few days. But it is not so with the affair of our salvation: the moment of decision is fixed for eternity. This moment will not pass; God alone knows it; none of us can know it. Perhaps it will not arrive for a long time, perhaps soon, perhaps this very hour; and when this moment arrives, it will not be possible to avoid it. In vain would we wish to defer it. Whatever state the affair of our salvation may be in, it will be judged.

But if this is so, can we sufficiently deplore the negligence of Christians? The affair of their salvation being an important affair in which everything is at stake, they ought to work at it with the greatest care; being an uncertain affair

in which everything is to be feared, they ought to apply themselves to it with all the precaution of which they are capable. Yet is this how they act? However important it is, they neglect it; however uncertain it is, they live tranquil! Ah, my brothers, how long will you wallow in so fatal a negligence? Cast for a moment your eyes on the example of a God made man. What has He not done for your salvation, and what ought you not to do yourselves? From the manger, follow Him, so to speak, step by step even to the cross. What poverty! what abasement! what steps, what journeys, and what fatigues! What ignominies, what persecutions, what sufferings! Why all this, my brothers? For your salvation and for mine. The God we adore formed the world with a word: He still preserves it without difficulty and governs it without embarrassment. But when He wished to labor for man's salvation, He humbled and annihilated Himself; He prayed, watched, fasted, wept, trembled; He submitted to death, and to the most cruel death. Yet what esteem do we ourselves make of an affair that God has esteemed so highly? What do we wish it to cost us? What care, what vigils, what fasts, what mortifications? Cowardly Christians, let us be confounded before God. This almighty God has, in a manner, played at all our other affairs; but in the affair of our salvation, He sweated even unto blood. And we, we play at this great affair, while we exhaust ourselves in other quite vain affairs, which occupy us entirely and which damn us. Yet, are there other affairs for us than that of our salvation?

I end with the wish of Moses; it applies to you, and it is the wish of my heart, the most sincere and most ardent: If only they were wise and understood, and foresaw their end! (Deuteronomy 32). Would that men truly understood their purpose in life! If only they did not content themselves with a vague and general knowledge of it, but made it the ordinary subject of their reflections, and of their most profound reflections, so that instead of attaching themselves so much to the present, they might take good heed of the future—that dreadful

future if they are reprobate, that blessed future if they are crowned, that eternal future from which none returns and which the ages shall never end! Ah, how thoroughly undeceived they would be of all those false ideas that toy with them and that ruin them while toying with them! It took no more than this to convert the most hardened sinners; it would take no more to convert you yourselves, my brothers, and to inspire in you an altogether new care for your salvation: If only they were wise, etc. You will think of it, but when? When death, coming to separate your soul from your body and tearing you from this world to make you pass into the other, you will no longer perceive before you anything but these two terms, salvation and damnation; when you will see them close at hand and will no longer be able to turn your eyes from them. You will think of it, but when? When, brought before God's tribunal, you shall await from Him your fate, His blessings or His curses, His rewards or His thunderbolts. You will think of it, but when? Alas! perhaps when, cast down into the fires of hell, you shall suffer amid the flames and shall learn that there is no more salvation for you. Ah, my brothers, will it be time then to think of it, and what misfortune for you not to have thought of it sooner? No more salvation! It was nevertheless my affair and my only affair. No more salvation! What fury, what despair!

Break, Lord, break this charm which seduces us here below. Open the eyes of your people to their true interests. Help us, by your grace, to consummate ourselves this work so worthy of you, and which matters so much to us: let it be our whole occupation on earth, until we come to the holy homeland to which you call us. Amen.

SERMON ON SOME OBSTACLES TO SALVATION

A great multitude of people followed Jesus. (John 6.)

We have the right, my brothers, to demand of Christians that they be imitators of Jesus Christ, as they are His disciples; that they follow Him as well as they adore Him, and that they revive His holiness in themselves, since they inherit His name: Sicut sunt haeredes nominis, says Saint Bernard, ita sint imitatores sanctitatis. The grace of their vocation, the vows of their baptism, the laws of the Gospel, in short everything that makes up Christianity, engages them to this imitation; and it is in vain that they glory in the name of Christian if they stray from the path that Jesus Christ has followed. However strict this obligation may be, very few Christians fulfill it, and, seeing how different their life is from that of Jesus Christ, one would judge, says Saint Chrysostom, that they are less the disciples of the Son of God than His enemies; that instead of rendering Him faithful obedience, they have sworn Him undying war. What confusion for us, my brothers, what shame! Jesus Christ wishes to withdraw from the Jews, and this people follows Him in crowds; He calls us, and we abandon Him, no doubt because it would cost us something to follow Him, and because we should perhaps have to renounce infamous pleasures, abandon places of disorder, or master an insatiable avarice. But, without speaking to you of those criminal victims which you know must necessarily be sacrificed to the obligation of following Jesus Christ and to the interests of your salvation, there are others, more hidden and less criminal in appearance, but more common and all the more dangerous for appearing more legitimate. I discover three principal ones, which are the complaisance one has for the world, the tenderness one has for one's friends, and the care one takes for one's life. But did the Jews who followed the Son of God into the wilderness not have the same obstacles to overcome? They exposed themselves to the hatred of the enemies of this divine Savior; they left their houses, the most

tender objects of their love, their spouses, their children, their brothers; they came near to lacking the necessities of life in a solitude where they found themselves without provisions and almost without resources. Let us learn, my brothers, from this example, to follow Jesus Christ and to walk after Him in the way of His commandments, even should it cost us a part of what we believe we owe to the world, to our friends, and to ourselves. These are three victims that we owe to our salvation, and it is the least we can do to sacrifice to so dear an interest the vain respects of the world, the tender attachments of the flesh, and the superfluous cares of life—three sacrifices that God demands of you, three victims that you must offer to Him, three obligations of which I hope to convince you, after having asked for the light of the Holy Spirit through the intercession of Mary. Ave, Maria.

FIRST POINT.

We must despise, we must sacrifice to the interests of our salvation the vain respects of the world. Why? First, because the world contradicts us in the practice of virtue only out of a spirit of spite and vengeance at seeing its maxims condemned by those of the just man; second, because our quality as disciples of Jesus Christ engages us to it, and because finally He threatens to disown us before His Father if we refuse to confess Him before men.

As one cannot establish falsehood without destroying truth, according to Tertullian's remark, He could not build a lie without demolishing the truth, it is impossible to authorize vice without discrediting piety, and it is, if I am not mistaken, one of the most pernicious artifices the world has ever employed to engage men in vice, to take away esteem from virtue. This artifice has succeeded only too well. Virtues have become despicable, and vices are given illustrious names. Vengeance passes for greatness of courage, and forgiveness of injuries for cowardice. Stubbornness in crime is regarded as the mark of a strong mind, and repentance as proof of weakness.

These false opinions cause men to blush at virtue and to take vanity in sin, hiding it in the very bosom of glory, as it was once said that the voluptuous, calling themselves disciples of Epicurus, honored their debaucheries with the specious title of wisdom: They hide their luxury in the bosom of philosophy. (Seneca). A wretched blindness which made the apostle say that men who have affection only for the earth place their glory in what ought to cover them with confusion and shame: Glory in the confusion of those who set their minds on earthly things. (Philippians 3).

Spite and the desire to avenge themselves have inspired this artifice in the world. It could not bear to see itself condemned by the just; for if the dead just condemn the living impious, as the Sage says, The just dead condemn the living impious. (Wisdom 4), if the shadow of virtue pronounces verdicts against the impiety of the age even from the tomb, how much more must the living just condemn the world? Without opening his mouth, says Saint Ambrose, he pronounces with authority against it. His actions are so many judgments and sentences. Thus, for example, an equitable judge who listens only to the law and his conscience condemns without speaking, this iniquitous judge who lets himself be corrupted by gifts and seduced by the splendor of greatness or the charms of beauty. This wise man who moderates his expenses in order to be able to succor the poor with his alms condemns without saying a word this prodigal who ruins his household by the luxury of his banquets, by the number of his servants, and by the excess of gambling. This virtuous lady whose dress is modest, whose manners are wise, and who finds her pleasures in visiting the poor or within the bosom of her family, loudly condemns that hot-headed woman whose dress offends modesty, whose air breathes nothing but libertinism, and who resents every moment not given to promenading, to gaming, or to the theater: The life of the just man reproves the sinner.

The world is too sensitive not to be stung by these reproaches, and too vindictive not to seek some vengeance for them. But because it cannot always

satisfy its whole hatred against the just, when it does not oppress them, it dishonors them, it cries out against them, it accuses them, it strives to ruin their reputation. If someone, says Saint Augustine, begins to follow Jesus Christ, if he gives alms, if he forgives injuries, if he frequents the sacraments, if he flees the pleasures of the age, if he embraces penance, if he renounces himself and takes up his cross, the world raises up enemies against him who contradict him and reproach him. He is asked whether he has lost his mind to undertake so singular a life, whether others who live in pleasures are not Christians, whether they do not intend to save themselves as well as he. Is it not folly, he is told, to distinguish himself in this way, and is it not shameful to play the devout thus: Why are you acting like a madman? You are going too far. Are others not Christians? That is foolishness; that is madness. (Augustine).

And what do you think, that same saint asks, produce these reproaches in the end? An evil that one cannot weep for enough. One has not courage enough to bear them, and to spare oneself them, one abandons Jesus Christ, one blushes at the attachment one had for His service and at the obedience one rendered to His commandments. As if to appear religious were to make oneself contemptible, one hides oneself to perform the holiest actions of religion. One would not wish to be seen going to confession, approaching the altars, visiting the poor, or doing any other good work, as if we still lived in the age of the tyrants, when it was a crime to be a Christian, when God alone was not worshipped, or was not worshipped with impunity, says Saint Cyprian; and as if working for one's salvation and preserving oneself from corruption were to make oneself ridiculous, one cannot resolve to make profession of piety. For at last, my brothers, we have come to this, and we can say it more truly of our own time than the great Augustine said of his, that disorder is so great that a just man would be ashamed to appear just among sinners: Such is the

perversity of the human race that there is reason to fear the just man might blush in the midst of the shameless.

To be ashamed of appearing just, of belonging to Jesus Christ, of living according to the Gospel—what weakness, what injustice, what folly! It is not pardonable in a Christian, who, according to Saint Augustine, ought to have a holy boldness in upholding the interests of the Gospel and of his God. Take care, said this great saint, not to blush at the name of Christian, when you shall find it among the enemies of Jesus Christ. The pagans will insult you, they will treat you as a worshipper of a dead man, as the servant of a crucified one; but have a holy impudence. Your brow ought not to blush at the crucified one, since you have armed it with the sign of His cross: remember that this mark of salvation is set upon your brow only to teach you never to be afraid of appearing a servant of Jesus Christ: Be bold of brow: what does your brow fear, which you have armed with the sign of the cross? But the world insults me. — Did it not insult the Son of God? It hated Him because He bore witness against it that its works were evil, and you ought not, it seems to me, to complain of being treated as your Master was. — The world insults me. — Eh! what have you to do with the world? It believes it is doing its duty in making war on you; do yours in despising it. It believes itself dishonored because you do not follow its maxims: believe that you would lose your glory if you followed it. After all, you did not receive at your baptism the spirit of the world; you received the spirit of Jesus Christ, and, to say something more, you must be in the world as though not being of it and as though not being in it. If you are not of the world, ought you to be affected by its sentiments toward you? What does it matter to you to displease the world, provided you please Jesus Christ? The example of a person who has a strong passion in the soul, which Saint Augustine uses on this subject, is admirable. When a lover is persuaded, he says, that a certain manner of dress and adornment pleases the one he loves, provided he finds himself well received in that condition, he

cares little about displeasing the whole world. A decent man who sees him take such pains to curl his hair, always tending to his locks, which occupy him endlessly, reproaches him for it: O te dementem talibus cinnis incedere! That is enough for him to hate whoever warns him with such wisdom, and to continue, in spite of him, to wear what pleases the person he loves. If then, continues this Father, lovers, in order to please their mistresses, despise the reproaches of their censors, however just and true these may be, why, in what we know will make us pleasing to God, should we trouble ourselves over the unjust censures and mockeries of worldly people who have not eyes sharp enough to know Him whom we love and whom we wish to please?

Once more, the world insults me. — Well, my friend, compare the mockeries of the world with the malediction of Jesus Christ, and tell me which of these two masters is more to be feared. It is an oracle pronounced by truth itself. If anyone blushes at Jesus Christ and His words, Jesus Christ will blush at him when He comes in His glory: Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed. (Luke 9). He will disown before His Father whoever shall have disowned Him before men. Salvation is therefore at stake, my brothers, and would it not be the last folly to expose oneself to losing it for I know not what complaisance, I know not what respect one has for the world? I should like to frequent the sacraments, one says, to be more diligent in the exercises of piety, not to expose my innocence in dangerous company; I even know that my salvation depends on all that; but what would the world say, what mockeries would I not have to endure? A vain respect, a childish shame, an unworthy passion for a Christian. Learn, my brothers, learn that this vain respect is the least victim you must sacrifice to your salvation. Remember well that the mockeries of a proud princess did not make David repent of the public marks of respect he had shown the ark of the covenant; remember that Saint Paul did not blush at the Gospel; remember, finally, that this people who followed Jesus Christ into the wilderness surely had

reproaches to endure; that they were mocked for being seen attached to a man whom those who seemed the most enlightened took for a false prophet. He knew well that one must not listen to the world when it is a question of going to God. Let us persuade ourselves today of this important and divine maxim. Let us begin to live as true imitators of Jesus Christ. Let each say to himself with courage: Let the world mock, let it insult me, let it amuse itself at my expense, I wish to confess my God openly, so that He may not disown me. And why should I not sacrifice to Him this vain respect, I who know that He demands nobler victims, and that I must immolate to the desire of pleasing Him and following Him even the tenderest attachments of the flesh?

SECOND POINT.

Love being the fundamental law of the state of Jesus Christ, it is rather surprising that the perfection of the disciples of this great Master consists in the hatred of the most natural objects of tenderness. Christians are recommended nothing but love; this love is even extended to the most hateful objects, that is, to enemies, and at the same time all love for the most legitimate objects is made a crime for them. They are told that whoever does not hate his father, his mother, his spouse, his children, his brothers, his sisters, and himself, cannot be numbered among the disciples of Jesus Christ. A severe and hard law. Forgive me, my God, this complaint, and allow me to say that when You make such precepts, You do not wish to be obeyed. Can I have at once a heart of flesh and a heart of stone? Can I be moved by what I ought to hate, and harden myself against what I ought to love? If You wished, Lord, that I should have aversion for my friends, You should have permitted me to accustom my heart to cruelty by hatred of my enemies; and if You wished that I should have tenderness for my enemies, You should have permitted me to accustom that same heart to gentleness by love of my friends.

But You unite, great God, this hatred and this love; You bring peace, and You declare war; You reconcile all men, and You divide them; You command them to love one another, and You wish them to hate one another. If they are insensible toward their enemies, You do not want them for friends; if they let themselves be moved, You want them not for enemies. What then shall I do, and to what shall I resolve?

But it is going too far to complain, O my God, of a law that is infinitely just. A single word from the great Augustine explains its whole justice. There is, he says, an order in love, and virtue consists in that order: Virtus est ordo amoris. One keeps this order, he adds elsewhere, and one loves with a well-ordered love, when one does not love what ought not to be loved, and does love what ought to be loved; when one does not love more what ought to be loved less, when one does not love equally what ought to be loved differently, and when one does not love differently what ought to be loved equally. Note in these admirable words four different states of the heart. I call the first coldness and indifference; the second, division and partition; the third, preference; the fourth, equality. No one doubts that the first three are criminal. To be cold and indifferent toward God, to stifle the natural inclination that draws us to Him, as to the center, the end, and the object of all loves, is this not the most enormous crime? Saint Paul fulminates anathema against those guilty of it: If anyone does not love Our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! (1 Corinthians 16). To divide one's heart, to give half to the world and half to God—is this not a more unjust arrangement? The prophet threatens with the ultimate punishment whoever makes this division: Their heart is divided; now they shall perish. (Hosea 10). To prefer the creature to the Creator, is this not a more horrible blindness? It is what Saint Paul called trampling the Son of God underfoot, and it is the crime for which he found no punishment severe enough: How much worse punishments, do you think, does he deserve who

has trampled underfoot the Son of God? (Hebrews 10)! The very names of these three states inspire horror.

It is not so with the fourth, which I call equality, because there are innocent tendernesses that flesh and blood form, legitimate unions which nature engages by bonds as sacred as they are inviolable, and which the very law of God obliges spouses to complaisance, fathers to affection, children to respect. One makes no scruple of showing these objects of permitted love the same regard that one shows to God, the adorable object of sacred love. Examples. A man, touched by the desire for his salvation, would like to withdraw from the great world, live with less ostentation, exempt himself from the foolish vanities of the age, and put himself in a position, through prudent and honest economy, to redeem his sins with alms. But he has a wife who loves the court, the great world, gambling, splendor, and pomp: how can he resolve to give to the poor what she destines for her vanities? He would displease her, and, since he ought to love her, he believes it is permissible to show her complaisance. A daughter is inwardly called to religious life, or to a life more regular than that of the world. She feels violent desires for retreat: her heart sighs after the happy moment that will see her leave the world. She feels indeed that God demands this sacrifice of her, and that she may perhaps risk her salvation if she neglects her vocation. But she is an only child; her parents adore her. The mere idea of the cloister or of devotion causes them to nearly die: they intend for her an advantageous match. She respects her parents, she loves them. How can she resolve to cause them so keen a displeasure? A mother, fearing God, would like to bring good order into her family, raise it in the fear of God and in an absolute distance from the maxims of the age. But she has a child who loves the world, who willingly frequents company, and who has a repugnance for the practices of Christian life. It grieves her to speak to him about it. This mother would like to correct his bad inclinations. She even groans over it before God; she knows that she ought to use the power that nature gives her to

withdraw this child from the misfortune he is running toward; but he is her beloved child; she loves him tenderly; she cannot resolve to cause him the slightest sorrow.

Tender attachments of the flesh, how dangerous and unjust you are when you equal the attachment one owes to God! Tenderness is permitted, so long as it is subordinate to charity; it becomes culpable as soon as one equals it to charity. God, says Saint Augustine, is quite willing that we love those with whom nature unites us, but He requires that this love be taken up, carried away by the swiftness of the love we owe Him, that we reunite all our loves to the first source of love, and He does not suffer that the smallest little stream should go out and stray from it. And to explain ourselves more clearly, with the same Saint Augustine, we may love our parents, but we must love God more than our parents: A father is to be loved, but the Creator is to be preferred to the father. This maxim, says this holy Doctor, can help us understand how Jesus Christ could have commanded us to hate our parents and to love our enemies. It is because everything must be referred to God. I love my enemies in order to reconcile them with Him; I hate my parents when they hinder me from going to Him. This hatred is not even an aversion of the heart, it is a regulated love, a lesser love, a subordinate love; we hate because we love less than we love God. I well know, my brothers, that this is not done without costing nature something; but is one saved without its costing something? Let nature be wounded by it, let the heart sigh over it; its sighs must not prevent it from hearing the voice of God calling it, and from going where it is called. Just as the animals that bore the ark of the Lord from the land of the Philistines into that of the Israelites marched straight on without turning aside and without being stopped by love for their young, which had been shut up, so too, says Saint Gregory, the faithful who wish to obey the commandments of God carry, as it were, on their backs the ark of the Lord; and although they may be bound inwardly by human attachments, these

attachments do not prevent them from walking straight in the path of salvation. The heart sighs; but the true Christian willingly sacrifices this tenderness of heart to the interest of his salvation. Parents, he says, father and mother, brothers and sisters, friends—confidants, objects so dear to me, I am yours as long as you do not prevent me from being God's. But from the moment you withdraw me from His service, that you hinder me from doing my duty, you are nothing to me anymore. I no longer regard you as parents or friends. I would tear out my eyes if they were an obstacle to my fidelity; I would cut off my hand if it opposed the good I intend to do, and you have no cause to complain if I treat you only as I would treat myself. Those who followed Jesus Christ into the wilderness had doubtless made these reflections, since they abandoned their houses, their families, and their friends. And would to God, my brothers, that you had the same courage, that a cowardly complaisance never make you forget God, that an unjust and excessive tenderness never turn you aside from your duty! I would almost answer for your salvation, provided you were willing to add to this sacrifice that of the superfluous cares of the earth.

THIRD POINT.

Anxiety and eagerness for the needs of present life is perhaps what turns aside the greatest number of Christians from the care of their salvation. This eagerness is all the more dangerous the more just it appears, self-love having found the secret of hiding cupidity under the specious pretext of necessity. For here is what is commonly said: “It is true that our salvation is the only affair that ought to occupy us; we cannot attend to it too seriously. But one must live: we have large families, and it is only with much labor, pain, and anxiety that we can acquire enough to feed our children and maintain our household.”

This excuse, which seems so reasonable, is very weak indeed, my brothers. I should like to have time to expose to you all its feebleness. In three words: there is nothing more unworthy of us, nothing more injurious to divine Providence, nothing more useless than the superfluous cares that one wishes to defend by this reasoning. If we were only the children of Adam, it would not be a debasement to labor for the earth; but we are the children of God, and it is to dishonor the character and dignity of our birth, says Saint Chrysostom, to apply all our desires to mortal and corruptible things. One must live, you say: this word is worthy of a pagan who knows no other life than this one, but it is unworthy of the Christian who, after this life, awaits an eternity. One must live: you deceive yourselves; one must save oneself. Life is common to you with the beasts; eternity alone is worthy of you: you share it with the angels. Moreover, it is in vain that you tire yourselves, and your anxieties serve you nothing, if God does not procure for you, by His providence, what you seek. Is there among you one who could add to his stature the height of a single cubit, Jesus Christ once said? If this is impossible, is it not just as much so to acquire goods, if God does not give them to you? His providence thinks of it enough, my brothers, and you do Him injury if you doubt it. It takes care of the smallest creatures; how could it abandon you? Do not be anxious about it, says Jesus Christ, do not worry about where you shall find something to eat, where you shall have clothing to cover yourselves: your heavenly Father takes care of it. And how should I not think of it, you will say? These are necessary things. And it is, says Saint Chrysostom, precisely because they are necessary that you ought not to seek them with so much care. If they were superfluous, you might believe that God would refuse them to you; being necessary, He is too good to let you lack them. Yet they are lacking to me. They are lacking to you, why? It is because you do not trust in Providence. You rely only on your labor, your industry, your diligence, and God abandons you to yourselves: He permits that all your cares be useless. If you hoped in Him, you would not

lack anything. Did the people who followed Him in the wilderness lack anything? He worked miracles to succor them. Have as little care for life as this people had, and God will renew His miracles: Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you. (Matthew 6).

And is it not a strange thing that we are willing to trust Him for what concerns our eternal salvation, and that we are not willing to trust Him for the goods, so little considerable, of this life? What father is there who would allow his son to die of hunger, says Jesus Christ in the Gospel? And do we believe that God could abandon His own? He nourishes thieves well, says Saint Augustine; how would He not nourish His children? He supports a bandit, but he will not support his son! He nourished you yourselves when you offended Him; will He abandon you when you serve Him? He will feed the wicked man; he will forsake the righteous! Judge, my brothers, what you ought to hope from Him by what you have already received from Him, and by what you receive from Him still every day. He died for you; He nourishes you with His body and His blood: will He refuse you the nourishment, so vile and so base, of your body? He promises you the goods of heaven; will He refuse you those of the earth? No, He has promised it, His promise is infallible. Seek first, He has said, the kingdom of God, attach yourselves to His service, apply yourselves to your salvation, and the rest will be given to you: Seek, etc. In vain, then, my brothers, will you excuse yourselves, on the pretext of the needs of life, for the negligence you show for the service of God and for your salvation. These superfluous cares are unworthy of you, injurious to God, to His Providence, and even useless for what you seek: you ought to sacrifice them to the desire for your salvation. Were not the guests of the Gospel excluded from the hall of the feast, though they alleged the same reasons as you? Neither retrench yourselves upon the complaisance and love you owe your parents and friends, since Jesus Christ commands you to hate even your fathers and mothers, your wives, your children, your brothers, your sisters, and yourselves, when it is a

question of His service and of your salvation. Was Adam any the less guilty in the eyes of God for having eaten the forbidden fruit through a cowardly complaisance for his wife? Finally, say no longer that the world prevents you from serving God as you would wish, and from working seriously at your salvation. You have nothing to settle with the world; it is the enemy of Jesus Christ, it ought to be despised. In a word, my brothers, to end where I began, the vain respects of the world, the tender attachments of the flesh, the superfluous cares of life, however innocent and legitimate these inclinations appear, are three victims that God demands of you and that you must sacrifice to the interests of your salvation. Let nothing of all that prevent you from hearing the voice of the shepherd, from going where He calls you, and from following Him faithfully in the way of His commandments, in the practice of the virtues, if you wish to follow Him one day in glory. Amen.

SERMON ON THE FAULTS TO BE AVOIDED IN THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW OF GOD.

If your righteousness is not more abundant than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5.)

As the Church, my brothers, existed long before her birth, one may say that the synagogue will subsist after her destruction, and that, just as there were already Christians among the Jews, one sees still Jews among Christians. The Jews were divided into two orders, says Saint Augustine. Some attached themselves to the ceremonies of the law, stopped at the letter, which kills, and confined their hopes to the promises that had been made to them of the goods of the earth; and these belonged solely to the synagogue. The others studied the truths hidden beneath the shadows of the ceremonies; they followed the movements of the spirit which gives life, and awaited other goods than those of a land flowing with milk and honey; and these belonged to the Church. They had Jesus Christ to come as their head; and if they did not bear the glorious title of Christians, they had the reality of it, the spirit and the virtue: They are Christians in reality, not merely by name. One must likewise distinguish two kinds of Christians. There are those who answer to the holiness of their vocation, and these are the true children of the Church. There are those who dishonor their profession by their conduct, who neglect the most essential duties, who violate the holiest laws, who abandon themselves to the most shameful weaknesses, and these, my brothers, are Christians only in name: Nomine, non re christiani; they belong more to the synagogue than to the Church, and as they are not the true disciples of Jesus Christ, because they do not have the full and abundant righteousness that His disciples ought to have, one may say that they are Scribes and Pharisees, because they have the

faults that the Gospel reproves in these disciples of Moses. The number of these faults is too great to enclose them all in a single discourse; I confine myself only to two which concern the law of God, whose observance ought to constitute the righteousness of the Jews, as it ought to constitute ours. They abandoned the commandments of God to observe the traditions of men: Abandoning the commandments of God, you hold fast to the tradition of men. (Mark 7). There is the first of these faults; here is the second. If sometimes they wished to honor themselves by the observance of the commandments of God, they chose what was lightest among these commandments and neglected what was more considerable: Straining out a gnat, but swallowing a camel. (Matthew 23); they swallowed a camel and were afraid to swallow a gnat; they paid the tithe of the smallest herbs, and they failed in the duties of justice, of friendship, and of faith. In a word, they were exact to the point of scruple in the smallest things, and they neglected to the point of libertinism the great ones. Would to God, my brothers, that these vices of the Pharisees had died with the synagogue! But they live again in the Church, and Christians are guilty of them. Let us not look for an abundant righteousness among all of them; it is infinitely rare, and one scarcely finds a few perfect Christians, while most are either libertines who prefer the tradition of men, I mean the laws of the world, to the commandments of God, or imprudent devotees who, doing of the commandments of God only what is lightest and most conformed to their humor, neglect what is more considerable. Libertinism, false devotion: libertinism which makes one prefer the laws of the world to the commandments of God; false devotion which attaches itself to what is lightest in the law of God, neglecting the principal. Two faults of the Pharisees, and yours, of which I shall convince you in the two parts of this discourse. Let not the libertines abuse what I shall say against false devotion, to cry out wrongly against devout men and women, but let them profit from what I shall say against libertinism to cry out against themselves, since if false devotion is

blameworthy because it does not fulfill the whole law, libertinism is so still more, since it fulfills nothing of it at all. Let each then take from these faults what concerns him, without wishing to set himself up as a censor of others: this precaution was necessary.

FIRST POINT.

It belongs properly only to God to make laws. Legislators, said Plato, ought to be the greatest and the wisest of men. Defects of temperament and the outbursts of passion have often made men make unjust laws. They have made them too austere when they have had a severe and melancholic disposition; they have made them too soft when they have been of a more tender and compassionate temperament. God alone has given men perfectly just laws, and of which one may say what has been remarked of His works, that they are formed with such exactness and perfection that it is impossible to find anything defective in them. Thus, among the most brilliant qualities, God often takes that of legislator, and it is expressly remarked in Scripture that He possesses perfectly the science of laws: Knowledge of the law before God (Ecclesiasticus 11).

As the laws He has made are just, He requires that they be treated with respect and observed with exactness. Was it not to inspire this respect and this exactness that He made His laws in the holiest place of the temple and in the very ark of the covenant? Was it not for this that He had so often forbidden anything to be added to them or taken away from them, that He had ordained such harsh punishments for those who should violate them, and that finally He wished them to be kept as dearly as the apple of the eye: Keep my law as the apple of your eye. (Proverbs 7)? The law of God is indeed the eye and the light of our soul; it is what guides us on earth to make us enter heaven, and, as we keep nothing more dearly than the apple of our eye, the law of God ought to be infinitely precious to us.

The Pharisees violated it nonetheless, holy and inviolable as it is. They introduced new customs, they invented new laws, and, as Saint Chrysostom remarks, the insolent authority they usurped went to such a frightful excess that it was a crime to contravene their ordinances, and one dared not violate their laws, while one violated those of God without fear. Can one imagine anything more iniquitous and more rash? They made laws themselves, and, in contempt of the laws of God, they observed those they had made. Jesus Christ often reproaches them for this double impiety: Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (Matthew 15): why do you violate the laws of God to observe your traditions? You wish that your laws be obeyed, and you do not obey God. You have established new customs, you do not wish that they be failed in, and to keep them you transgress the most important precepts God has given you.

However shameful it may be to Christians that the same reproach can be made to them, they deserve it no less than the Pharisees, and if you wish to make some reflections on their conduct, you will assuredly find them guilty of these two disorders: first, they receive other laws than those of the Gospel; second, in order to observe these laws, they transgress those of the Gospel. As it belongs only to the sovereign to make laws, man ought to receive them only from God, who is his only and legitimate sovereign, or from those who hold the place of God, who exercise a power they have received from Him. But he is often base enough to regard as his masters his greatest enemies. Do not believe, says Saint Ambrose excellently, that the sinner is subject only to God. He is the slave of several masters: the passions, the demon, the world, claim to be his sovereigns. Avarice, Ambition, Voluptuousness say: This man belongs to me: Omnia et singula vitia dicunt: Meus est. The demon adds: He belongs to me. The world replies: He cannot be taken from me. All these masters claim to give him laws. I wish, says Avarice, that you let this poor man who asks you for alms die of hunger, that you oppress this widow, that you not pay

this workman, this merchant, that you seize this inheritance, that you buy this benefice. I demand, says Voluptuousness, that you form intrigues and secret friendships, that you see all sorts of company, that you attend all sorts of spectacles, that you keep neither fast nor abstinence, that you refuse yourself no pleasure, and that you never do penance. As for me, adds Ambition, I command you to despise those who are inferior to you, to flatter the great in order to please them, and to make yourself a path to honors, whatever it may cost you in a thousand crimes. Spare me, my brothers, the trouble of reporting the laws that the demon makes for the sinner; they bear the character of his malice, of his impiety, of his aversion for the good, of his attachment to evil, and of his hatred against God. You are not ignorant, either, of the laws of the world; you know that the prophet represents it seated as a master in a pestilential chair, where it explains the maxims of vengeance, of dissimulation, of deceit—in short, everything that makes the clever man, the political man, the man of intrigue, the man of the age.

Accursed and detestable laws, who would believe that anyone could ever follow you? Yet they are followed nonetheless, and one is unjust enough to prefer them to the laws of God. The great Augustine complained of those who, priding themselves on speaking with elegance, esteem the laws of eloquence more than those of God. They have, he says, a prodigious care to observe all the rules of discourse that have been prescribed to them by mere men like themselves, and at the same time they trample underfoot the laws and the rules of salvation which they have received from God Himself: They observe the covenants of written documents, yet neglect the eternal covenants of everlasting salvation. They blush if they let slip a barbarous word, and they have no confusion if they commit an infamous action. What can I do, my brothers, but renew this complaint with as much and more justice, and say of the laws of the world what this admirable Father said of the laws of

eloquence! One is infinitely more exact in observing these detestable laws than one is religious with regard to those of God.

How many times, my brothers, have you rendered yourselves guilty of this unjust preference! After you had received that affront to which you have been so sensitive, Jesus Christ and the world prescribed to you the laws you must keep toward your enemies; you listened to these legislators, you heard them tell you: I wish that you pardon, and I, I wish that you avenge yourself. Perfection consists in forgiving; glory consists in avenging oneself. If you do not forgive, I disown you; if you do not avenge yourself, I despise you. Which of the two have you obeyed? You obeyed the world: you avenged yourselves. Unjust as you are, why do you transgress the laws of God to observe the detestable maxims of the world? For, in short, I must make you the same reproach that the Son of God made to the Pharisees: you imitate them, your righteousness is like theirs. As if laws depended on custom, as if the most just rules ceased to bind when they cease to be observed, and the most unjust began to bind when they begin to be put in practice, one believes oneself dispensed from the laws of Jesus Christ, because it is ordinary to violate them, and one esteems oneself indispensably obliged to the laws of the world, because it is the custom to keep them. One can say of the latter what Scripture says of idolatry. The vanity of men introduced idolatry into the world: its worship passed into custom, and this criminal custom having been more and more authorized by the passage of time, error has been observed as a law: As a pernicious custom took hold, this error was observed as if it were law. (Wisdom 14). Thus the malice of men has introduced into the world luxury, immodesty, vengeance, and a hundred other impious practices. These disorders have passed into custom, and this custom having become fortified by long usage, the maxims are regarded as inviolable laws: Hic error, etc. It is in vain that we discover their abuse, that we say that this excessive luxury is condemnable, and that one must employ for the relief of the poor what one

gives to vanity; that the innocence and modesty of Christianity do not suffer this great immodesty of dress, that the law of Christians is a law of peace and not of vengeance, and a hundred other similar maxims drawn from the very source of the Gospel. We are told in reply that what we reprove is a custom, a usage, and that this usage is a kind of law to which it is impossible not to submit. This is how one lives at present in the world, it is said; being in the world, one must live as the world does: Hic error, etc.

Is this then, my brothers, the respect and the obedience you owe to the laws of Jesus Christ, your God and your only sovereign? Is it thus that your righteousness is more abundant than that of the Pharisees? To observe the traditions of men, they violated the law of God; and you violate these same laws to observe the laws of the world. Blind Christians, senseless sinners, what are you thinking of? Shall it be on the customs of the world or on the laws of Jesus Christ that you shall be judged? Shall it be an admissible excuse for you on the day of judgment, when, condemned by Jesus Christ for having spoken evil of your neighbor, for having avenged yourselves upon your enemy, for having been a stumbling-block to your brother by your vanity and your immodesty, and so many other disorders received and authorized in the world, you shall answer Him that it was the custom of the world, that others did as you did? Would such an excuse, I ask you, my brothers, be admissible before this sovereign judge? Would it not be, on the contrary, a fresh motive for condemnation, since Jesus Christ has openly declared to you in His Gospel, and it is one of His principal laws, that you ought to flee the world, that the world was His enemy, that it was plunged in iniquity, and that whoever loved it and followed it had no charity residing in him: If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2).

Oppose then, my brothers, to these unhappy customs, the wise precepts of Jesus Christ; and to animate yourselves still further to their practice, despite the conveniences of the world, say to yourselves these words of the great

Augustine: Christus est, qui Dominus est, audiamus, timeamus, faciamus: it is Jesus Christ who commands us, let us hear His words, let us fear His judgments, and let us practice the maxims He teaches us. The world will insult you, it is true; you will be reproached for your singularity; you will be asked why you do not live according to the customs received in the world. But answer this seductive world with what the brave Mattathias answered the officers of King Antiochus. I end this first part with this beautiful trait of Scripture. Antiochus, having entered Jerusalem by force of arms, enjoined the Jews to sacrifice to idols. Several obeyed his orders in cowardly fashion, and he believed he would obtain the same submission from Mattathias. A man came to tell him, on the king's behalf, that the king demanded of him only that he do what the others had done, and that on this condition he would load him with honors and goods. What! I, cried Mattathias, raising his voice to be heard by all the people, what! I should have the cowardice to violate the law of my God in order to follow that of the Gentiles! Though all nations should obey King Antiochus, though all the Jews should become slaves to his orders, I, my children, my brothers, we shall remain inviolably attached to the law of our fathers: I and my sons and my brothers will obey the law of our fathers. (1 Maccabees 2). There, I say, is how you must answer those who would wish to oppose to you the profane laws and customs of the world. What! I should violate the law of my God to observe that of the world! Though the whole world should fail in its duty, I do not wish to fail in mine; though the whole world should sacrifice to the idols of pleasure and of fortune, I will not sacrifice to them. The law of my God shall always be a rule inviolable for me and for those who depend on me: Ego et filii mei et fratres mei obediemus legi patrum nostrorum.

But if you reduce it to practice, take care to reduce it to its whole extent, so as not to fall into the second fault of the Pharisees, who observed of the

commandments of God only what was lightest, neglecting what was more considerable.

SECOND POINT

To practice the most essential duties of Christianity and to neglect what is lesser in it, is to lack fidelity; to attach oneself scrupulously to what is lesser and to neglect the principal, is to resemble the Pharisees: two faults which we must avoid if we wish to be perfect observers of the law.

Everything is so great in the service of God, that whoever truly fears Him neglects nothing and does everything, down to the smallest things, with an equal circumspection and the same respect: He who fears God neglects nothing. (Ecclesiastes 7). It even seems that the fidelity we owe Him appears more clearly in the exactness one has for small things. This fidelity consists principally in the number of services we render Him, and in the purity of intention with which we render them to Him. One calls a servant faithful who serves his master in all things, for himself and with the sole design of pleasing him. Now it is in small things that these qualities appear. It is rare that great occasions present themselves to show the attachment we have for God. One is not often exposed to sacrifice for His interests one's life or one's goods; but it happens a thousand times a day that one can render Him little services, and, in order not to neglect a single one, one needs great fidelity, one even needs a very pure intention. The glory that accompanies great services carries one to render them; small ones have nothing that animates; and when one lets none of them slip away, one has without doubt a tender and faithful love for the one to whom one renders them; thus, it is ordinarily in small things that God tests the fidelity of men. There was nothing less considerable than what He forbade Adam, and you know that He gives great praises and magnificent recompenses to servants who had been faithful to Him in quite unconsidered employments: Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you

over many things. (Matthew 25). Indeed, if wisdom and power, with which God governs men, shine particularly in small things, according to the beautiful remark of Saint Augustine, why should the fidelity of men in the service of God not consist particularly in the exact observance of the smallest things?

But if it is to be faithful to God not to neglect the small duties, to attach oneself to them so much that one neglects the principal ones, is to resemble the Pharisees, and it is the reproach that the Savior of the world so often made to them. Woe to you, He said to them, doctors of the law, hypocritical Pharisees, who pay the tithe of the smallest herbs, while you neglect what is more important in the law, justice, friendship, humility, faith, charity, etc. Never was reproach more just. The Pharisees were scrupulous to the point of superstition in trifling matters. They were lax to the point of impiety in important matters. They could not bear to see the apostles take their meals without washing their hands, and they defiled themselves in their own conscience with a million crimes. They were scandalized to see the disciples of the Son of God pluck ears of grain on the sabbath day as they passed along the fields, and eat them to appease the hunger that pressed them, and they did not fear to violate that holy day by assembling to destroy Jesus Christ. They refused to enter into Pilate's praetorium, for fear that, having become impure, they could not eat the Passover, and they had no scruple in oppressing an innocent man through calumny, and in sacrificing Jesus Christ to their envy, their ambition, and their vengeance. Was there ever conduct more irregular? To behave thus, is this not to render oneself guilty of these disorders that God detests in Scripture, when He says that the double weight and the double measure are abominable before Him: Pondus et pondus, mensura et mensura utrumque abominabile apud Deum (Proverbs 20)?

God does not wish that His ordinances be weighed in the deceitful balance of self-love and of human traditions, said Saint Augustine. He does not wish that we make use of these balances to say, as it pleases us: This weighs more, this

weighs less. He requires that we weigh everything, not according to the arbitrary weight of the human mind, but according to the immutable weight that He Himself has set in the eternal order of His truth. At this weight of the sanctuary, what is considerable weighs much, what is less so does not weigh as much. The Pharisees, on the contrary, made use of a deceitful balance. They made much of what was very light, when it was conformed to their inclinations and their desires; they despised what was very considerable, when it did not please them. Alas, my brothers, how ordinary this injustice is! It has belonged to every age, and it has passed down to us. Judah, son of Jacob, had committed an infamous act; he did not fail to send what he had promised to the woman he had corrupted, and, not having been able to find her to redeem his word: "At least," he said, "I have sent what I had promised; this woman will not be able to accuse me of having failed in my word." Note in this action the deceitful balance of which I have just spoken to you. To profane the sanctity of his body and his soul by an infamous commerce appears to Judah only an indecent action. He does not even think of it. To fail in his word to a debauched woman seems to him an unpardonable fault. He would blush if one could convict him of it. Herod, remarks Saint Chrysostom, commits the same injustice. This wretched prince could not bring himself to violate the oath he had made to a girl, and he consented to have the divine forerunner put to death. He dreaded having his friends as witnesses of a failure to keep his word, which would have been quite innocent and quite glorious, and he did not fear to have all the ages as witnesses of an execrable murder.

How often, my brothers, do we render ourselves guilty of similar injustices without even perceiving it! How many persons who claim to live piously, and who indeed separate themselves from the commerce of the world, renounce luxury and vanities, frequent the sacraments, and live in a very wise and very orderly manner outwardly, how many, I say, of these persons are exact to the point of scruple in small things, and pay no attention to great ones! They are

impatient, curious, hot-tempered, slanderous; they judge their neighbor rashly; they make clever and subtle mockeries of him; and although these faults wound the first obligations of Christianity, they make little or no scruple of them. Do they, on the contrary, fail in some small devotions to which they are attached by self-love, do they neglect but once to say all their prayers, do some affairs prevent them from communicating on a certain day when they are accustomed to do so—they believe they have committed a great sin, they are inconsolable. Strange illusion of the devout life; dangerous abuse which the great Augustine formerly explained only with much sorrow. I note, he says, that one attaches oneself stubbornly to the new practices one introduces, and of which one makes new sacraments, so to speak; I do not disapprove of them, though I do not explain myself as freely about them as I would, if I did not fear to give occasion for scandal to certain turbulent minds, and even to some persons of sufficient goodness and piety: but what I cannot see without being deeply afflicted is that, while one attaches oneself to small devotions, one neglects things that are very salutary, that Scripture prescribes: Sed hoc nimis doleo quia multa quae in divinis litteris praescripta saluberrime sunt, minus curantur, and one so preoccupies oneself in favor of these practices that, by the greatest injustice in the world, you see persons make themselves a greater grief for having failed in what they are accustomed to do, than for having committed great sins.

Thus spoke this great doctor; thus have spoken all who have followed him. Do everything you please, said Saint Bernard; but never hope that what you do will be pleasing to God, once you fail in what He commands you by His law: Ingratum est quidquid obtuleris, neglecto eo ad quod teneris. The small duties, said Saint Francis de Sales, are like the outer walls of a fortress; the great precepts are like its interior; and just as it would be folly to guard the outer walls after the heart of the fortress had been burned, it is a still greater folly to

neglect the obligations of Christianity in order to attach oneself to trifling observances.

What anathemas has the Son of God not hurled against the Pharisees! I have already told you: Woe to you pharisees (Matthew 23), Why? Because you who pay so exactly to the priests the tithe of mint and the smallest herbs of your garden, you forget what you owe principally to God and to your neighbor. Could I not say as much today, my brothers? Woe to you who spend whole hours in our churches, while you leave a family in neglect, children without instruction, and while you give just occasions of anger and impatience to those who depend on you. Woe to you who, from the foot of our altars and our tribunals, where you appear with such modesty and recollection, go into company to tear apart your neighbor with the most malicious slander. Woe to you who approach so often our awesome mysteries, and who, from that very place, go and trouble a household by your caprices, your impatience, and your pride. Woe to you who fast, who keep vigil, who practice austerities, while, jealous of a vain reputation, you cannot bear the slightest affront, return injury for injury, and seek everywhere the means of avenging yourselves. What piety! resumes Saint Augustine. A man gives alms to the poor, gifts to the Church, and he does not pay his debts. What will God say to him? You show me those to whom you have done good, and I will show you those to whom you have still done more harm: You speak of what you gave, and I tell you what you stole. You show me those whom you have fed, and I show you those whom you have reduced to beggary, and perhaps made perish of hunger: You remember those whom you fed, but you do not remember those whom you killed..

From all this, my brothers, what must we conclude? Shall I perhaps tell you, with a celebrated author of our own day: Do not pray so much, but be gentler, more accommodating, more exact within your family? Do not fast so much, but be more upright in your conduct, less scheming, less attached to your own

interests. Do not be so careless in your dress, but be more submissive and more humble in heart. Do not bring so many offerings to the altar, but return what does not belong to you; be more patient in suffering injuries; quit, if necessary, the very altar itself, to go and embrace your enemy: or rather, let us say better; for in the end, following the thought of the great Augustine, I do not disapprove of your practices, I praise them, on the contrary, and I exhort you to them: pray, fast, dress simply, present your offerings at the altar: these are things not to be omitted. But there are others more indispensable to which one must first attend. These are the laws of justice, of charity, of humility, of patience: You ought to have done these things and not left the others undone. (Matthew 23). Do not, then, neglect small things. It is by this that you will show much fidelity to God; I have already told you so. But before all else, satisfy the greater duties; they make up the essence of our religion, and by this means your righteousness will be more abundant than that of the Pharisees; you will put yourselves under the shelter of the anathemas with which the Son of God has so often threatened them, and you will merit the reward promised to the perfect observers of the law, which is eternal happiness. Amen.

SERMON ON MORTAL SIN

Which of you shall convict me of sin? (John 8.)

These words of Jesus Christ alone, my brothers, prove to me that he was God. Only a God-man could speak in such a way. However much wisdom, light, or courage a man may possess, he can never entirely escape sin. Philosophy may sustain reason for a time, but passion will eventually have its turn, and the firmest heart will succumb. One must be God to say boldly: Who shall convict me of sin? Who can call me a sinner? This holy boldness of the Savior should serve only to confound us, who are nothing but sin, who scarcely ever speak or think without sinning. But if our weakness does not allow us to live entirely free of sin, let us at least avoid mortal sin. It is the cruel monster that devours and kills us. Demons, however hideous they are depicted, have no ugliness but that of sin: hell holds torment for sin alone; God kindles his wrath against sin alone. I do not fear to say that if sin could be made visible, exactly as it truly is to the soul that commits it, that soul would be so horrified by it that it would become its own executioner.

I shall therefore believe, my brothers, that I have powerfully exhorted you to hate sin, if I can succeed in making it known to you; and I believe I can achieve this purpose best by showing you the blows it strikes against God. This is only part of its ugliness and malice, it is true, but it is the principal part. What, then, is sin, considered from God's side? It is a sovereign contempt of God; you will see this in my first point. What is sin? It is an insolent rebellion against God, an assault upon his divine life; you will see this in my second point. Contempt of God, rebellion against God—what could be more horrible? This is quickly said, but it is not so quickly understood or explained. If you please, my brothers, follow me in mind and heart, and as I speak, conceive within yourselves a mortal hatred for this enemy of your God.

FIRST POINT

Nothing is felt more keenly than contempt, and it is to avenge themselves for it that subjects have been seen to revolt against their prince, and army generals to turn against the state the very troops they were meant to employ in its defense. How many families have been divided, how many friendships broken, how many circles split apart by disdainful airs, by injurious favoritism, by cutting words? What is it that daily produces those secret quarrels reduced to a matter of honor? What produces those bloody duels forbidden by every law, if not the contempt that one person has shown for another?

But, asks Saint Chrysostom, if men possess this sensitivity, will God not possess it too? Will he remain unmoved by the contempt that men show for him when they sin? For what is mortal sin, if not a disordered movement of the will that abandons God to attach itself to the creature, and therefore an injurious contempt of the Divinity? A contempt so keenly felt by God that he is compelled to complain of it through his prophet: "My people," he says, "have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to cling to the creature, and have hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2).

But to grasp the full extent of so injurious a contempt, one would need to understand, first, what God is and what the creature is; second, which creatures the sinner prefers to God; and finally to reflect that it is in God's presence and under his very eyes that the sinner offends him. One would need, I say, to understand what God is and what the creature is. But neither one nor the other can be fully understood—the one because of his infinite greatness, the other because of its infinite wretchedness. The one is the almighty, the mighty God, the creator of all things; the other is nothing but ashes, weakness, vanity itself. The one is infinitely wise; the other is born in ignorance and

lives in error. The one is immortal, the sovereign arbiter of life and death; the other is the spoil of time, the plaything of inconstancy, the prey of death. The one, finally, is absolute being, infinite and independent; the other is but a shadow, a vapor, a phantom; or better, let us say with the prophet, a nothing, a nonentity: as nothing (Isaiah 63). And yet, O heavens, shudder—it is this shadow, this vapor, this phantom, this ash, this weakness, this vanity, this nothing, this nonentity, that mortal sin prefers to God, that absolute, infinite, independent, almighty, immortal being. Be astonished, O heavens, at this (Jeremiah 2).

But let us go further and ask what creatures the sinner prefers to his God; or rather, what rank he assigns him after driving him from his throne and setting his own subjects above him. Does he place God in his heart? No, my brothers, lower still. Beneath his feet? Lower still, lower. In the depths of the abyss? Lower yet. What am I saying, my God? Something I cannot comprehend and yet am compelled to witness. The sinner tears God away from among the angels, from among men, from among all creatures, and places him—shall I say it?—beneath some infamous thing that he prefers to him! Do you believe this, sinner—and would I dare say it, had the Fathers not said it before me?—every time you yield to temptation, every time you commit a mortal sin, you renounce your God, who is your beginning and your end; you trample his grace underfoot, you annihilate his spirit within you, and you set up in its place your own passion, which you make your divinity, your idol.

Who says this? Saint Augustine, who had experienced it himself amid the disorders of his own life. Know, sinner, says this Father, and blush at the same time for your insolence, that for every vice and passion to which you make yourself a slave, you have that many new gods whom you worship in contempt of the true one. Do you let yourself be carried away by anger? That anger is your divinity: are you angry? Anger is a god to you. Have you

conceived in your heart a disordered love? The creature who is its object is your divinity: lust is a god to you. Why is this so? Because the sinner makes his idol and his god out of whatever he loves, whatever he esteems—an idol, a false divinity, an untamed passion that he prefers to his true God, for whatever each man desires and reveres, that thing is his god.

Ah! what shame and what injustice, to set God beneath one's passion—to place God at the bedside of a woman, in the glances of an immodest woman, in the brutal and shameful pleasures of a lustful man; to place God beneath the foam of a furious man's rage, beneath the sordid pettiness of a miser, beneath the bile of a madman, beneath the fury of an envious man, beneath the tongue of a swearer and blasphemer. I knew, Lord, and I had learned, that heaven and earth cannot contain you; I had learned that you have set your throne in the sun, that you are entirely surrounded by light; but I had never before seen your divinity sullied, stained with filth, and reduced to nothing beneath some shameful creature. O sin, O detestable sin!

Saint Paul, speaking of the sin of impurity, says that a Christian who defiles his body at the same time defiles the body of Jesus Christ, to which he is joined by baptism, and makes it the members of a harlot (1 Corinthians 6). This expression of the Apostle surely fills you with horror, my brothers, and I myself tremble at it. Yet dare I add that every mortal sin contains something still more injurious to God? In Saint Paul's thought, it is merely a mingling of impurity with purity. That is horrible enough, it is true; but far more horrible still is the fact that there is no mortal sin that does not also amount to a sacrilegious preference of impurity over purity itself, over the very essence of purity. It does not merely unite the body of Jesus Christ with the members of a harlot—it prefers to God prostitution itself, or some other brutal passion.

The Jews preferred Barabbas to Jesus Christ, and their crime is to this day the horror of the nations. And you, sinners, are you more innocent? Are you not

more guilty still? Christ had not yet died for the Jews, and the Jews did not know the Son of God, when they preferred Barabbas to him. Christ has died for you; for you he shed his blood down to the last drop; he is God himself—you believe this—and yet, O sacrilegious contempt! a thousand times over you have preferred to him—not merely a Barabbas, a thief, a rebel; not merely creatures, but the most unworthy of creatures: a shameful passion of greed, of envy—what am I saying?—the devil himself, the execration and horror of all nature! He prefers even the devil to God, said Tertullian, and it is true. On one hand God commands you to curb your passions, to refuse consent to temptation; he offers you his grace, and promises you an eternity of happiness as your reward. On the other hand, the demon urges you to satisfy yourself; he holds out the bait of a fleeting pleasure and offers it to you as your reward. What do you do, sinner? You hold the scale. On one side you place your God, his law, his grace, and his paradise; on the other, the demon, his maxims, and the pleasure he offers. You boldly decide in favor of the latter, and you renounce your God and his rewards.

You despise his commandments in order to obey the demon; you follow the orders of Satan, you resist those of your God; you accept the demon's offer, you refuse your God's. Ah! you therefore prefer the demon to your God! Be astonished, O heavens, at this.

Holiness, go purify others than me; Providence, go guide others than me; Wisdom, go enlighten others than me; Eternal Father, uncreated Word, Holy Spirit, you do not please me; I renounce your graces and your consolations. You offer me a paradise to come; the demon offers me a pleasure now. I enjoy the pleasure now; I give up your paradise—he prefers even the devil to God.

This is perhaps not how you would put it into words, but it is how you act. Your actions are the faithful witnesses of the feelings in your heart; and what is even more horrible is that you make the demon your accomplice in the

contempt you show your God. You put him in a position to insult God and say to him: I have done nothing for the sake of this soul. No one has seen me live, suffer, or die to save it. It receives from me nothing but marks of hatred. You, its Creator, have overwhelmed it with blessings; you, its Redeemer, went to incredible lengths to save it. Yet it abandons you to follow my party. It despises your laws in order to become my slave. Oh, my brothers, if you retain any feeling of religion at all, if you still have any knowledge of your God, of his greatness, of his kindness, can you remain unmoved by this reflection?

But, you will say, to despise God in this way, to prefer to him, as you put it, even the devil—alas, one does not think of it that way; one merely seeks one's own satisfaction. You do not think of it, you say, sinners, and yet you do it all the same! Are sinning and despising God not one and the same thing? And would your sin be a sin at all, if it were not a contempt of the divine majesty? You say you seek only to satisfy yourselves—but you satisfy yourselves only by refusing to obey God and by transgressing his laws. Now, what father would not consider himself despised by his children, if they refused to show him respect and obedience? What prince would not feel himself offended by his subjects, if they violated his laws with impunity? Is it not a mark of contempt for a judge, to commit a crime boldly in his very presence? And is it not precisely in these wretched circumstances that you offend your God—before his sight, under his eyes, and in his very presence?

God is everywhere; this you do not doubt. He fills heaven and earth with his immensity; present in the depths of the abyss as much as in the highest heaven, he sees all things, and nothing can escape the keenness of his gaze. Day and night, light and darkness, the crowded world and the solitary retreat, are all the same to him. He pierces, uncovers, and illumines the most hidden thoughts of the heart, and no one can sin without having him as judge and

witness of his most secret actions. The sinner is ignorant of none of these truths; he knows, wretched man that he is—and often his own conscience, through its cruel reproaches, makes him feel only too keenly—that this great God is watching him, that God is intimately present to him even in his most infamous actions; and yet, in contempt of this divine presence, he does not hesitate to indulge his passions. He knows that God stands at his side, and he compels him, if I may put it so, to hold the torch so as to light up the very affronts committed against him. What contempt! What an insult!

Sinner, detestable sinner, if you could find a place where God did not see you, I would say to you with Saint Bernard: go, sinner, indulge your passions, carry out your criminal designs, since God does not see you there—sin where you know God is not present. Were you resolved to commit this act of impurity or injustice, I would tell you: go search this city for a house, in that house for a room, in that room for a corner where God is not present; search on every side, examine your chairs, your bed, your curtains, see whether God is hidden there; go further still, and if you find that spot where God is not present, then go, wretched man, go commit your abominations. But if this great God is everywhere, if he fills every corner of that room, if your bed and your curtains are full of his eyes watching you, how is it that you show no respect for the presence of this adorable majesty? How is it that you do not tremble at the injury you do him? How do you dare to commit in his sight what you would not dare commit in the sight of men? Can one show God a more injurious contempt than this?

That is not all. Sin is not merely a contempt of God, as you have just seen, but also a rebellion against God that goes so far as to make an attempt upon his very life.

SECOND POINT

Saint Ambrose said that the sinner is a nothingness armed and in rebellion against his God, and he spoke the truth. For, first, the sinner resists God; second, he raises himself above God; third, he would destroy God and annihilate him, if he could.

First, he resists God. Indeed, what is it to commit a mortal sin? It is to say to God's face: "I do not acknowledge you as my sovereign; I will not obey you." This is how the prophet understood it: "You have broken the yoke, and you have said: I will not serve" (Jeremiah 2).

Every time you sin mortally, you feel the force of the law: I appeal to your own experience. Tell me, sinners, before committing that injustice, that slander, that act of impurity, did you not feel within you the voice of the lawgiver? Ah, how strong it was, how powerful, how full of weight and authority! It is this voice, says Saint Augustine, that makes itself heard even among the most barbarous peoples, amid confusion and ignorance. Every man naturally knows how to recognize it. From it springs the fear and dread felt before committing a crime, and the shame and remorse felt after committing it. From it come those shadows one seeks out in order to hide from the eyes of others disorders that offend reason, disorders one would not blush to commit if one did not feel the shame of the transgression. What, then, does a sinner do who feels and perceives the force of the law, pressed by an invisible lawgiver making himself heard in the depths of his heart? "I will not serve," he says. No: despite the evidence of a precept whose force I feel, despite the sway of a sovereign who commands me, I will affect independence, I will withdraw myself from his law, I will shake off his yoke: I will not serve. I feel two masters and two laws within myself: that of God, which he has engraved in the depths of my soul, and that of the world and of my passions, whose deformity I recognize. I will abandon God; I will not obey: I will not serve.

Yet, my brothers, this is not the full extent of the odiousness of the sinner's revolt against his God. The devil, says Saint Bernard, is the king of all sinners, and these proud subjects follow faithfully in the footsteps of their haughty prince.

What are the steps the devil takes? The first is that he wishes to raise himself as high as his own source: "I will ascend... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14). The second effort of this untamed spirit appalls me, and I would not dare say it, had Saint Paul not assured me of it. He is not content with mere equality—that would be too little; he claims to see God beneath his very feet, exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped (2 Thessalonians 2).

One cannot contemplate this sacrilegious undertaking without horror. Yet if it happened once that the Ark of the Lord shattered the idol of Dagon, it has happened a thousand times that man's idols have overturned the altars of the true God.

Yes, this is your very crime, sinners. Whatever your rank or condition, says Saint Bernard, you do not merely lay claim to equality with God, but to superiority over him. God wills that his will be done; the sinner also wills that his own will be done—there is the equality. Here is the difference: God commands that his will be accomplished only in things just and reasonable, whereas the sinner, raising himself above God, wishes to be obeyed blindly, whether with reason or without it.

O God! What a dreadful excess on the part of a sinner! Can anything more be added to this? Yes, my brothers, something yet more horrible still, something that astonishes, that strikes, that terrifies. Sin—grasp this if you can—this nothing, this nonentity, this abortion of Satan, this offshoot of hell, carries the excess of its rebellion all the way to the very life of my God. Not content with

resisting him, it would annihilate and destroy him, if it could. It is here, my God, that I would wish for a voice of thunder, a breast of steel, to make myself heard by every sinner.

Listen, then, my brothers—it is Scripture itself that speaks: "The wicked man has stretched forth his hand against God, and has strengthened himself against the Almighty. He has run against him with a stiff neck, armed with the thickness of his fat neck" (Job 13).

The impious man, the sinner, as though he had come to blows with his equal, insolently raises his arm against his God and threatens to strike him: he has stretched forth his hand. The sacrilegious wretch, this abominable and useless man, this ash, this dust, this worm of the earth, revolts against whom? Against God, his creator, his benefactor, against the sovereign of heaven and earth. This murderer of God gathers all his strength, and employs every effort to destroy and annihilate the Almighty: he has strengthened himself against the Almighty. He goes to insult him, head held high, with the utmost insolence: he has run against him with a stiff neck. He makes use of every quality with which God has adorned him, of every grace God has bestowed on him, as so many darts with which he arms himself to dethrone God and deal him the deathblow: armed with the thickness of his fat neck.

This, I say, my brothers, is how Scripture speaks of the sinner whenever he sins mortally; and an argument of Saint Bernard's will convince you that Scripture has said nothing excessive. Indeed, when a man sins mortally, he wants one of two things: either he wants the damnation which is the penalty owed to his sin, or he wants that sin to go unpunished. That such a man should want his own damnation cannot be said; the will never inclines toward an evil, and damnation is the sum of every evil. It is therefore the impunity of his sin that he desires. Yes, and it is in this that he attempts to annihilate the perfections of his God, and wishes that God did not exist. For, says Saint

Bernard, either he wishes that God not see his sin, or that, seeing it, God not wish to punish it, or that, wishing to punish it, God be unable to do so. If he wishes that God not see his sin, he thereby wishes that God be ignorant, and consequently that he not be God at all. If he wishes that God see it and be content with it, he thereby wills that God be wicked, approving and condoning iniquity. If, finally, he wishes that God be displeased with his sin and yet be powerless to punish it, he thereby wills that God not be happy, that he not be God. For God would not be God, were he not happy and content in all things: he therefore wills that God himself, as far as lies in him, should not exist; he wills him to be either powerless, or unjust, or foolish.

It is therefore true to say that sin is an insolent rebellion against God, one that would destroy him if it could. Your blows, sinners, do indeed shatter at the foot of his throne. Impassible and immortal, he is beyond the reach of your fury; and though he detests and abhors your sin, he does not for that reason cease to be happy and content in every way. Yet, as far as it depends on you—through the very nature of your sin, the disposition of your heart, the inclination of your will—you strive to make him displeased, to disturb his repose, to disturb his blessedness, to annihilate his majesty, to overturn the order of his providence, and consequently—horrible as it is to say—to destroy his divine essence itself and to put him to death: your own will, as far as lies in it, destroys God himself.

Do you now grasp, my brothers, the malice of mortal sin? Do you conceive the injury it does to God? If everything I have told you so far to convince you does not suffice, and if perhaps you think I have overstated the matter, I set before you a crucifix. Look upon it; contemplate attentively this rigorous justice, a God dying, stretched upon the cross to expiate sin. There you will understand that its malice infinitely surpasses everything I have said and everything one could conceive. You will understand that the injury done to

God is infinite, since an infinite satisfaction was required, and a God had to die to make reparation for it. You will understand that everything the Saints and Angels have ever done, or ever will do, of good, would never render to God as much honor, pleasure, and glory as a single mortal sin causes him of outrage, displeasure, and dishonor—so much so that it would be better for every creature to be annihilated, for the whole universe to return to its original nothingness, for there to be no more saints in paradise, than for a single mortal sin to be committed.

Grasp these truths, you who have forgotten God (Psalm 49); you who pile crime upon crime, whose life is nothing but a fabric of sins, and who, to use the words of Scripture, drink down iniquity like water. Grasp it, sinners, whoever you may be; meditate attentively on the injury you have done your God through so many mortal sins, and, pierced by the bitterest repentance, join me in heart and mind in the regrets and the holy resolutions I am about to offer to my God in the name of this whole congregation.

Sovereign majesty of my God, which shall I admire more—your infinite patience in enduring me, or my own incredible boldness in offending you? The Angels, O my God, adore you, and I despise you; kings lay down their crowns at your feet, and I enslave your glory to my passions. The Cherubim never cease calling you Holy, Holy, Holy, and, not content with these praises, they cover their faces to mark their reverence; and I, a vile creature, animated dust, living ash, dare to insult you and to make an attempt upon your very life.

No, my God, your goodness and my wickedness can go no further—your goodness in enduring such excesses, my wickedness in committing them. Alas, as often as I have sinned, I have deserved that the earth open beneath my feet, that hell swallow me, and that the sun hurl down upon me as many thunderbolts as it has rays. But instead of these punishments, and worse ones still, you are the first, O my God, to offer me pardon and to sue for peace.

O goodness without equal! O patience worthy of a God! Blessed Spirits, you who stand unceasingly before the throne of the Lamb, I call you to witness the resolve of my heart. Deign to carry my promises up into the abode of your glory: before the face of heaven and earth, at the foot of the altars, in the presence of my God, I solemnly declare that neither life, nor death, nor anything evil in this world shall ever be capable of making me commit a single mortal sin again. I detest, I abhor, I supremely hate every sin I have committed, because they displease my God, because they offend him, because they show him contempt, and because they insult him.

Confirm, Lord, by your grace, what you have inspired in me today. Grant that, through a complete change of life, I may honor you as much as I have despised you, that I may be as submissive to you as I have been rebellious. Grant that my heart may break with sorrow for having treated you so unworthily, that my eyes may pour forth a torrent of tears to wash away the abominations of my past life; grant, finally, that, animated by a true spirit of penance, I may walk the narrow path that leads to eternal life. Amen.

SERMON ON THE ORDINARY CAUSES OF RELAPSE INTO SIN

Bring forth fruits worthy of penance. (Luke 3:8)

However pitiable, my brothers, the condition of man in the state of sin may be, if all penance were genuine, or if it were always easy to distinguish true penance from imperfect and false penance, the sinner, in the midst of his very misery, would still have something to console him, because he could at least regard penance as an infallible resource and a sure foundation of tranquility and peace. The great misery of the sinner, says Saint Chrysostom, is that although he is certain of the reality of his sin, he can never be absolutely certain of the validity of his penance. What makes his condition deplorable is that the very penance he has done, or believes he has done, often troubles him no less than his sin itself. Do you wish, then, Christians, to be instructed today on so important a point? Do you wish to know what false penance is, so as not to be deceived by it? I say it boldly, my brothers: it is that penance which is followed by relapses — I mean frequent relapses into mortal sin. One sins, one confesses; one falls again, one confesses again; one spends one's life in an alternation of sins and confessions, and imagines that these repeated confessions, interwoven with crimes, constitute true penance and always bring pardon for the past — a dangerous illusion which I intend today to dispel.

Frequent relapses into mortal sin are proof, not indeed certain, but highly probable, that previous confessions were null and the penance false — a proposition which I establish upon this one: those persons of whom I speak almost never have, in their confessions, a lively sorrow for having offended God, nor a firm resolve never to offend him again — two conditions essential

to true penance, which, serving as proof of my first proposition, will form the two parts of this discourse and the subject of your attention.

FIRST POINT

When I say that relapse should make the sinner fear that his penance was not genuine, God forbid that I should thereby wish to cast scruple into souls, by presenting every relapse as an infallible sign of false penance. I know that it belongs to God alone to know the depths of hearts, and the Gospel teaches me that there are twelve hours in the day during which a man's will can change. I know that the penance of the Ninevites, which was judged genuine by God's own testimony, did not prevent them from falling again. Thus, Christians, I do not come here to bring you to despair. Let us be lenient, or rather let us do justice to human weakness, and let us not overstate a truth that is terrible enough in itself. I speak, then, only, as I have already suggested, of relapses into mortal sin that are prompt, frequent, and preceded only feebly by remedies and contrary efforts. These are the fairly ordinary relapses which I offer as a very strong conjecture that the previous penance was false, because it is highly probable that it was without sorrow; this is my first reason.

If, to prove this, I needed the testimony of the Fathers, I could scarcely cite a single one who did not support it, and time would scarcely suffice to cite the passages. I would tell you first, with Tertullian, that the sorrow of those who fall again so quickly is nothing but the sorrow of hypocrites; with Saint Augustine, that a man who returns to his sin after having confessed it is a deceiver and not a penitent; with Saint Fulgentius, that his tears are feigned tears, his sighs useless sighs; that he does not ask pardon of God as a true penitent, but rather insults him as a proud man: such a man, it might be said, does not ask pardon of God, but mocks him with his arrogance. And descending thus from century to century, I could overwhelm you with a cloud of witnesses, as Scripture puts it, proving that frequent relapses are highly

probable indications that there was no sincere sorrow for sin in previous confessions. But without dwelling on so long a detail, which might weary you and for which the time allotted to me would scarcely suffice, I shall content myself with the simple rules of common sense, supported by the testimony of Saint Paul. To be truly pierced with sorrow for one's sin is to detest it above all things, to hate it more than all imaginable evils. For if there is something one hates more than sin, there is necessarily something one loves more than God, to whom nothing should ever be preferred, so that a Christian who has this sincere sorrow for having offended God must be disposed to suffer anything — loss of goods, loss of honor, death, and even hell itself, were it possible — rather than fall back into mortal sin.

Now, I ask you, my brothers, and I appeal to common sense: is it credible that a man who returns to his sins almost as frequently and as easily as before his confession, sometimes even more easily, had in his previous confessions that sovereign hatred of sin, that sincere sorrow for having committed it? What likelihood is there that one who regards God's grace as the greatest of all goods should consent to lose it a moment later with such coldness and indifference? What likelihood that souls whom nothing astonishes, who do not hesitate for an instant between God and the world, who grow familiar with vice, who drink iniquity like water, to use the expression of the sacred books, who return with pleasure and eagerness to their disorders, should have detested them a little while before in good faith? Would you judge a reconciled enemy in this way, if on the very same day and without cause he insulted you again? If the offense followed the reconciliation so closely and so easily, could you believe there was honesty in his conduct, that he had asked your pardon in good faith? No, surely not; and why, then, would you have me judge more favorably of the same conduct you show toward God? Ah, Christians, let us not be so grossly blind about the most important of our affairs. When one has a great aversion to something — such as the aversion

one ought to have for sin, that is, an aversion surpassing all other aversions imaginable — one does not seek it out so soon, one does not return to it so easily; on the contrary, one sacrifices everything to avoid it.

What, my brothers! It takes years to root out of your heart the aversion you will have conceived for a person who has displeased you, who has offended you but once; it takes a thousand means to employ, a thousand devices to set in motion to rid yourself of the memory of it, and yet you would have me believe that you have the greatest displeasure in the world at having offended God, whom you offend again so easily; that you have supremely hated a sin into which you fall back so often! Grant, if you can, these two contrary things at once: to hate something sovereignly and with your whole heart, and yet to turn toward it with inclination shortly afterward, to resume with such ease and complacency what you say you hold in such horror. Who will believe you, my brothers? You would persuade me at once that you love and hate the same object at the same time. No, no; these contrary movements of the will never meet at the same time in the same heart, and if they can succeed one another, one does not ordinarily pass from one to the other without an interval, and without giving oneself many a struggle.

But speak for yourself, great apostle; I need your authority. To have, according to Saint Paul, a true sorrow for one's sin is to be dead to sin; and just as after death there can be no return to life except by a miracle, so likewise, after one has truly died to sin through sincere sorrow for having committed it, it takes a kind of prodigy for sin to revive at once within us. How could it be, says this apostle, that we should rise again to sin, we who are truly dead to it? This, my brothers, is the question I put to you with the apostle. If you were truly dead to your sins through a sincere sorrow for having committed them, how could it have happened that you were so quickly and so easily brought back to life? If your sorrow had been as sincere, your

conversion as genuine as that of Paul, of the Magdalene, and of Augustine, would you still be subject today to the same disorders? What a monster it would be if Saint Paul, after his conversion, had still persecuted Christians; if the Magdalene, after the Ascension of the Son of God, had returned again to her impurities; if Saint Augustine had fallen back into his debaucheries after having made both his sin and his repentance so public! How could we, who are dead to sin, still live in it? No, my brothers, no; experience shows us every day that true penances are followed by an eternal divorce from sin, or that, if it sometimes happens that one falls back into the very state from which one had truly emerged, it is never all at once nor from the very first step. It takes time to ruin that treasure of grace and to drive out the Holy Spirit, who has made himself master of the heart. One never begins with the greatest crimes. One relaxes little by little in the practice of piety, one allows oneself small liberties which open the door to temptations, and before coming to mortal sin, how many inspirations, how many graces, how many remorse of conscience must one not stifle! Yet within the space of a few days, sometimes the very next day, often on the very same day, this dead sin revives, this weakened, conquered, disarmed enemy finds itself as strong, as much the master of your heart, as if God had never taken possession of it. Once again, my brothers, this is what I cannot understand, any more than the apostle: how can we, who are dead to sin, still live in it?

But, you will tell me, I confessed, and in my confession I had such good sentiments, I conceived such keen regret for my faults; my heart broke with sorrow, my eyes melted into tears. Well, what does all that prove, my brothers? Saul confessed his sin, Antiochus confessed it, Judas confessed it. They gave as much, and perhaps more, evidence of sorrow than you did, and yet they had none that was genuine. What, then, do these good sentiments you claim to have had prove? Here it is: they prove that God, in truth, has moved you to sorrow, but not that you have always had that sorrow. For one must

distinguish two things in penance: the desires of penance and the acts of penance; the workings of grace and the cooperation of our will with grace. The desires of penance can exist without the acts of penance, and the workings of a sufficient grace without the cooperation of our will. But there is no true penance where the one is separated from the other, and this, my brothers, is what deceives most sinners. They imagine themselves to be truly penitent because they sometimes feel desires for penance, because God, through the workings of his grace, touches their hearts, enlightens their minds, makes them know the ugliness of sin, excites them to hate it, and produces other holy impressions in their souls. But take care — these are only desires of penance, not acts of penance. They are only the workings of grace, not the cooperation of our will; and just as, when strongly solicited to sin, one does not sin thereby unless the will consents and deliberately adheres to it, so likewise, when excited to penance by strong considerations and extraordinary movements, one is not thereby penitent unless the will cooperates with these graces and produces the acts that are essential to penance. The main thing is a sincere sorrow for one's sin: one can be mistaken about this; it is easy to confound it with the outward appearance of penance, and I will never believe it genuine so long as it is followed by prompt and frequent relapses. I always return to Saint Paul's principle: if you had been truly dead to sin, if you had detested it with complete sincerity, how could you still commit it? How could we, who are dead to sin, still live in it? Do you want me to believe your sorrow genuine? Show it to me by its effects, by its fruits. Break off this evil commerce, frequent no longer this place of debauchery, abandon this creature, restore this ill-gotten good, be less quick to anger and less given to swearing, more modest in your manner, more restrained in your speech; in a word, fall no more into your past disorders, or at least fall into them no longer as often. Otherwise your penance, despite your tears, will always remain suspect to me,

since I shall have every reason to believe that it has lacked not only sorrow, as I have just shown you, but also firm resolve.

SECOND POINT

A firm resolve never to offend God again is no less essential to true penance than a sincere sorrow for having offended him. You believe, sinners, that you have had this firm resolve in your previous confessions. You have thus professed it at the feet of a confessor; you still flatter yourselves with it today; and when your relapses are brought up against you, when you are asked how it is possible to wish to abandon sin absolutely and yet a moment later seek it out again with such ardor, you blame your weakness or your inconstancy, while I, with more reason, blame the lack of this firm resolve, and I say that you fall back into your disorders because you never had a genuine will to leave them. I will convince you of this by destroying these two pretexts that seduce and deceive you.

This firm resolve of which I speak, and which is inspired by true penance, is nothing other than a deliberate, firm, constant will never again to offend God. Of what is a will of this nature not capable, when it can do what it wills? Only two things are needed to work wonders in the world: power and will. Neither achieves anything without the other; but when they are joined together, there is nothing they cannot do. Now, although we cannot always do what we will, it is nevertheless certain that the firm resolve never to sin again is never beyond our strength, that it depends only on us to carry it out, however weak our nature may be, however violent the temptation, however seductive the pleasure — this is a truth of faith which the Church has decided often enough in our own day by the condemnation of the errors of Jansenius.

In the sacrament of Penance, says a holy doctor, a mutual promise is made between God and man. Man promises God never to offend him again;

God promises man not to abandon him in his resolution, and to give him all the graces necessary to enable him to keep his promise: God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. The apostle does not say that it is a matter of God's goodness and wisdom to give us the help we need in our necessities and not to allow our enemies to tempt us beyond our strength, but he says expressly that it is a matter of his fidelity, to mark the engagement of his word: God is faithful. A sure and infallible promise, which inspired in Saint Paul that strength and that confidence with which he cried out: I can do all things, and however weak I may be in myself, I am strong enough through the grace of him who strengthens me: I can do all things in him who gives me strength.

I return to my principle: only two things are needed to work wonders in the world — power and will. Once one truly wills what one can do, everything is accomplished, nothing resists. Now, you protest at the feet of a priest that you have the will to correct yourselves and never again to fall into your sins; faith, moreover, teaches me that you have the power. Why, then, do you not correct yourselves? Why do you persevere in these bad habits? Why do you always fall back into your sins? Necessarily, my brothers, one of two things must be true: either you are mistaken, or God deceives you; either you do not have that will you flatter yourselves with having, or you do not have the power to amend yourselves. Now God assures me that you have this power. It is infallible; you would not have me deny it: it is you, then, who lack that will you flatter yourselves with having, and it is to this defect, therefore, rather than to your weakness, that your relapses must be attributed.

I had this will, you will tell me; I had this firm resolve in my confession; but as man is naturally subject to change, if I fall back, it is my inconstancy that must be blamed rather than my lack of true penance. — Are you speaking seriously, my brother? Inconstancy, you say, is the cause of your relapses. But

you experience this inconstancy and this fickleness only in the amendment of your faults. In everything else you are constant and firm in your resolutions. What man of good sense, having taken a firm resolution after mature deliberation, changes it so soon and without some necessary reason? And in what other circumstance, in what other affair, have you ever noticed in yourself such sudden reversals? Do you not, on the contrary, adhere to your resolutions with firmness, and often even with obstinacy; and if after some time you do change, is not some powerful reason or some new motive required to bring about this change in you?

Now, when you violate these good resolutions you say you have made never to sin again, what new consideration solicits you, what new charm seduces you? Is it not the same sin with the same circumstances? Is it not the same pleasure with the same attractions? Is it not the same God who forbids it to you? Is it not the same hell that threatens you with its flames? Is it not the same paradise that offers you its crowns? Is it not, finally, the same Jesus who presents himself to your mind, nailed to his cross, drenched in his blood, crowned with thorns, and covered with wounds, to move you by the spectacle of his sufferings, and to beg you not to crucify him again by your crimes? If, then, there is neither pressing reason nor new motive that engages you to return to sin and to change your resolution, you who are otherwise so firm and so constant, how dare you here plead your inconstancy? How dare you try to persuade us that you had a sincere will never again to offend God? It is not, after all, that I wish to deny absolutely that man is inconstant in matters of relapse, as in everything else. He is, I admit it; and if your relapses were either less prompt or less frequent, I would have no difficulty agreeing with you on the principle you allege, and attributing them to your weakness or your inconstancy rather than to a lack of firm resolve. But that this change of will and resolution should occur so often and so quickly on the same subject, without any new reason, only and always in the matter of relapse into sin,

while it is so firm and so obstinate in everything else — can this be believed in good faith, my brothers? Do you believe it yourselves? Would you believe it in any other instance? If a man had promised you the same thing a hundred times, and as soon as he had left you, forgot his word and his promise, would you be content to call him inconstant? Would you not rather say that he was a liar, a man of bad faith, and that, whatever he may say, he never had and still has no intention of paying you?

Do yourselves the same justice, my brothers; recognize that after having so long deceived your God, after having so often deceived yourselves by the unreliability of your promises, you have never had either a true sorrow for having offended God, or a sincere resolution never to offend him again; that your pretended sorrow, like your fine protestations, has been nothing but hypocrisy, falsehood, and imposture. It is, then, with good reason, my brothers, that I warn you today, with the Wise Man, never to rest secure on your penance, and always to fear, even for sins that have been forgiven. But, you will say, if they are forgiven, why alarm me about them still? Ah, my brothers, understand now this mystery which you did not understand before: it is that you believed these sins forgiven, and in fact they are not; it is that there is a false penance more capable of damning you than of saving you, and that is the penance of habitual sinners who relapse.

But do you wish, on the contrary, my brothers, to taste the sweetness that a sincere conversion produces in a soul? I repeat it: bring forth fruits worthy of penance, change your life, return no more to your disorders. Apart from this, says Saint Augustine, it is in vain that you humble yourselves, it is in vain that you rely on the number of your confessions and reassure yourselves upon the tears you have shed. What good does all this do you, if you always fall back, if you do not change your life? What does it profit penitents to be humbled, he asks, if they do not change? You say, to reassure yourselves: I

have confessed, I have asked God's pardon. But once again, what does it profit? What good does it do you, if you remain always the same? Do you wish to have them, my brothers — these confessions? To nourish your presumption, to foster your impenitence, to harden you against the fear of God's judgments. What does it profit? To scandalize devotion, to discredit the use of the sacraments, to authorize the conduct of libertines. What does it profit? To damn, often along with yourselves, the confessors who, through a weak complacency, give you absolution, and who lack the strength to undeceive you about the enormous abuse you commit. What does it profit? To what end, finally, does it serve you? To satisfy the weakness of your imagination without curing the malice of your heart, to lead you by a path of illusion to final impenitence. Bring forth, then, fruits worthy of penance; once again, my brothers, bring forth fruits worthy of penance, change your life, return no more to your disorders. This is the means to set your mind at rest concerning your past confessions, to enjoy during this life a true peace of conscience, and to obtain in the next the reward of true penitents. Amen.

SERMON ON THE DELAY OF PENANCE

My dear children, Saint Augustine used to say, do not think ill of me if I sometimes announce to you terrible truths. It is far more advantageous for you to suffer some bitterness on earth in order to taste eternal sweetness in heaven, than to spend this life in a false joy in order to endure in the next torments that will never end: it is better to endure a small bitterness here and afterward attain to everlasting sweetness, than to have here a false joy and there endure punishment without end. Physicians restore health to their patients only by bitter remedies and potions, and I, continues this holy doctor, with this thought, and in view of the account I must render to God for you and for myself, likewise choose remedies that are indeed harsh; but they are the most fitting to heal the sicknesses of your souls and to make you enjoy an eternal health in heaven: thinking on this, my dear ones, and knowing that I must render an account both for my own salvation and for yours, I choose to administer remedies that are indeed harsh, so that with you I may afterward deserve to enjoy unbroken health in the company of the angels.

You will allow me, my brothers, to say the same thing to you. I often preach to you sad and terrible truths, not because my natural disposition inclines me to frighten you, but because my duty obliges me to it. If I make the path to paradise very broad for you, if I tell you there is nothing to fear, that there will always be time enough to convert, that however you may live you will be saved, I flatter you, but I deceive you: I please you, but I ruin you, and I ruin myself along with you. I prefer, therefore, to benefit you by preaching to you a severe morality, though true and necessary, rather than to please you by feeding you agreeable falsehoods; I prefer to frighten you usefully rather than to flatter you dangerously — to save you and save myself with you by instilling in you a salutary fear, rather than to damn you and damn

myself with you by placing you in a vain and deceptive hope. It is with this design, my brothers, that I establish today two great truths, for which I ask not only your full attention but also deep reflection in private, since nothing in the world is more important. The first is that to delay one's penance in the least is to expose oneself to a very great danger of dying in impenitence; the second is that the more one delays one's penance, the more the penalty increases.

FIRST POINT

It is little to threaten an evil if one does not make known its magnitude; it is little to threaten you with death in sin, if I do not make you understand the magnitude of that disaster. But how can this be done? It would require having appeared before the tribunal of the living God, having heard the accusations, the reproaches, and the sentence. One would need to know what hell is, what it is to be eternally deprived of God, abandoned by God, hated, cursed by God, and punished in the full force of his anger and the whole strength of his arm. One would need to know what it is to be eternally in a prison of fire with demons, to burn, to cry out, to howl, to blaspheme, and to despair throughout all eternity; one would need, I say, to know all this, one would need to have experienced it, to understand what it is to die in final impenitence, since all this is but the sequel to it. Sinners, whoever you may be, you are threatened with this misfortune, and the least delay in resorting to penance places you in very great danger of falling into it. Let us try to lay out in order the proofs of this sad and dreadful truth. What is it to delay one's penance? It is to put it off to another time; to put it off to another time is to dispose of time to come, and to dispose of time to come is to deceive oneself dangerously.

Is time yours, my brothers? Are you the masters of it, to dispose of it in this way? Is it a fund that belongs to you, on which to build hopes of living until the term you have prescribed for yourselves? Speak, oracles of truth; speak, divine Savior, and undeceive these presumptuous men, who were told

that it was not for them to know the times or the moments which the Father had fixed by his own authority. Mark this well, presumptuous and rash man, says Saint Bernard: it is in God's power that time lies, and not in yours. Why, then, do you claim to dispose of it, as if it were yours to command? What do you presume, wretched man, about the future, as though the Father had placed the times and the moments in your power and not rather in his own?

The future time is not mine, you will say, but I believe God will grant it to me. — Who has told you so, my dear listener? Has God promised it to you? Where is this promise written? It is true that he has promised pardon to your penance, but has he promised you the time to perform that penance? If he has not promised it to you, how dare you promise it to yourself? Do you not know that the hour of death is uncertain, that from life to death there is but a single step, that this step can be taken in a moment? Do you not know that death's very nature is to surprise, that it comes suddenly like a thief, when it is least expected? These are the very words of Jesus Christ. Add to this that your presumption obliges it to hasten, that a sudden death is the ordinary punishment of the presumptuous. Among the illusions the demon strives to cast into the minds of Christians, the hope of a long life is one of the principal and most dangerous. This cruel enemy, unable to make them believe that penance is unnecessary, tries at least to persuade them that nothing presses, that they will always have time enough for it. Saint Augustine himself had once yielded to this false persuasion, when God was inwardly urging him to convert. A little longer, O my God, he would say, a little longer, and then I will leave the world, I will withdraw from sin.

But do not trust your enemy, my brothers; this is the salutary counsel the Wise Man gives you: never trust your enemy. The demon is an enemy who breathes nothing but your ruin. He tells you that you are young, that you have nothing to fear, that your health is good. Ah! never trust your enemy. Believe

rather your friends; believe the great Augustine, who warns you not to flatter yourself with a long life, however flourishing your youth, however vigorous your health may be; not to delay your conversion; that however little you delay it, it is always too much, since life is uncertain: one must not trust in health, nor in age, as a remedy for one's salvation; he who is slow is always uncertain of his life. In six months, you will say, when I have finished this business that troubles me. — But, my brother, are you assured of living six months? Never trust your enemy. — Will it be at Easter? — And what if there should be no Easter for you! — Will it be within eight days? — And what if you have no more than three? — Tomorrow, then, will be the end of my debaucheries. — And what if this very day is the end of your life! — Ah, I do not believe I shall die so soon. — It is for this very reason that you ought to fear, since death comes when it is believed far off. Do not trust yourself: never, neither for a day, nor for a moment. Believe rather the best of your friends, believe Jesus Christ. It is he who holds the keys of death and of life. It is he who tells you that death comes when it is least expected, when it is not looked for. The Roman sage, speaking of our life, calls it a deposit entrusted to us: we are called to a deposit, not to an inheritance. God, who has entrusted us with this deposit, reclaims it when it pleases him, for such are the laws of a deposit, and these laws are inviolable. The demon tells you that this deposit will not be reclaimed from you for a long time, that being in the flower of your age you ought to feel secure: trust him not, do not believe it. Believe rather Jesus Christ, who warns you to hold yourself ready, treating you as a fool if you do not, since perhaps this very night he will reclaim this deposit: this very night your soul shall be required of you. But let us suppose that God grants you the time you promise yourself in order to convert and do penance: once that time has come, will you have the will to do so? How many times has it happened to you to change your resolution? Whence come all these relapses into the same sin, these promises made in confession that are followed by no

effect? Is it not to be feared that the same thing will happen again in the future? Ah! how many are there now in hell whose wills were nevertheless firmer and more constant than yours! But I do not stop there. I grant that you will have the time, that you will have some feeble will to convert; but as for the grace to convert in fact and to render your will effective, are you assured of having it? For you are not unaware of this maxim of the Apostle, that without grace we can do nothing for our salvation, nor consequently convert ourselves. You know what the great Augustine teaches, and with him all the theologians, that a man who has fallen into sin cannot rise again unless God stretches out his hand to him; that without this help he will remain eternally in this abyss: it is always in the depths unless it is set free; and if you wish to know the reason, it is evident. The soul that has freely left God through sin can return to him only through a free movement of the will. The will cannot make this movement unless it is stirred by a good thought. Now there is no good thought without grace — an express decision of the great Apostle, who tells us that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. This is not yet enough, my brothers. This free movement does not suffice; it must be supernatural, there must be a proportion between this movement and its term. The term is supernatural — it is friendship with God in this life and glory in the next. It is necessary, then, that the movement leading to this twofold term be supernatural, and there can be no supernatural movement that does not have a supernatural principle. This principle, above nature, is grace. It is, then, absolutely necessary, this grace, to make this return. Are you assured of having it, my brothers? You know nothing of it; but here is what I know:

First, that God gives it to whom he pleases; this is an oracle of Scripture that ought to make all men tremble: I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will show mercy on whom it pleases me.

I know, secondly, that God owes it to no one, that he is in no way obliged to grant it. If it were a debt, says the Apostle, it would no longer be a grace.

I know, thirdly, that God does no wrong to the sinner when he refuses it to him, since to a man who is in sin he owes nothing but punishment.

I know, fourthly, that God refuses it to many. Antiochus asked for it and could not obtain it; Esau asked for it with many tears and did not obtain it, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it with tears.

Finally, I know, my brothers, that all your delays, that the contempt you show for God's goodness, oblige him to refuse it to you, and this is what is marked by these terrible words of Scripture: Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer not from day to day, for his wrath shall come on a sudden. Do not delay your conversion from day to day, because God's anger will burst suddenly upon your heads. Fear these frightful threats, you who delay converting to God and who put off your penance from day to day. You weary this patience of God who awaits you; it may well turn into fury. You neglect to return to him while he offers you his grace; you must fear that it may one day be refused you. He calls you, my brothers; he uses my ministry today, and I tell you, on behalf of the Savior of the world: I say to you, arise. Rise, come out of this wretched state, but come out of it as soon as possible. The peril is great; delay not a moment; delay would render your sickness more incurable. For the peril grows all the greater the more one delays.

SECOND POINT

I say, then, my brothers, that the more one delays one's penance, the more the danger increases. I come now to the proofs, which I draw both from God's side and from the sinner's side: from God's side, who must give the grace; from the sinner's side, who must profit from the grace. On God's side, I

maintain that the more the sinner delays, the more God is obliged to refuse him his grace.

Nothing is more certain than that the delay of penance obliges God to withhold those efficacious graces without which we shall never convert. Grace asks only to communicate itself, to spread itself into souls, as soon as it finds no obstacle there, and you are not unaware, my brothers, that there is no other obstacle than the unworthiness of the subject. This obstacle is powerful; a single mortal sin is enough to render a man unworthy of every kind of grace. For as a single mortal sin renders one unworthy of glory, it consequently renders one equally unworthy of all the means to attain it, the chief of which is grace. If, then, a single mortal sin renders a sinner unworthy of grace, then the greater the sin, the more it is multiplied, the more it renders him unworthy — a necessary consequence. Now, it is certain that the more the sinner delays doing penance, the more his sin increases, not only in number but even in enormity. It is a constant maxim that the longer sin remains in a soul, the more enormous it becomes, and this is true both of habitual sin and of actual sin, not only because this habitual stain, remaining longer in a soul, defiles it ever more, but above all because it marks in the sinner a striking contempt for the friendship of his God, since he remains so long without troubling himself to seek it. It is likewise a constant truth, stated by the Angelic Doctor and confirmed by daily experience, that a sin committed soon attracts another, and this one a third. Wretched fecundity of sin: it is an abyss that calls to another abyss. And the reason, my brothers, is that this man whom God, before his sin, regarded as his friend, on whom he watched with a special goodness, whom he strengthened with his graces, once he has fallen into sin, God no longer sees in him anything but an enemy. He no longer surrounds him with his care, he deprives him of his special graces, and what results from this? That this man, abandoned to himself, goes from bad to worse, falls from one lapse to another, and it is in this sense that theologians say that one sin is the

punishment of another. Thus the more one delays converting, the more one increases the number of one's crimes, the more one renders oneself unworthy of grace, and consequently the more one exposes oneself to the danger of dying in impenitence. This truth, my brothers, appears no less certain on the sinner's side. I establish it likewise upon two principles which are its foundations: upon the weakness and upon the strength of the sinner. Let me explain. The great happiness of a faithful Christian consists in his weakness and in his strength; the great misfortune of a sinner consists equally in his weakness and in his strength. The great happiness of a Christian consists in his weakness in letting himself be overcome by grace, and in his strength in resisting sin. I call weakness that docility of mind which allows itself to be easily persuaded, and that disposition of the will which lets itself be touched by the attractions of the divine spirit and by the movements of grace; I call strength that lively apprehension of eternal truths with which his mind is wholly penetrated, and, in his will, that constant and generous resolution to resist sin.

But observe, if you please, my brothers, what sin works in us through a sad and fatal metamorphosis. It changes this weakness into strength, and this strength into weakness; it weakens and it fortifies the sinner at the same time. It weakens him so that he may succumb to sin, and it fortifies him so that he may resist grace, and this is what I call the great misfortune of the sinner, and what I beg you to observe carefully. I can say nothing to you more important, nor more deserving of your attention. Sin weakens and fortifies the sinner. It does so in two different ways: it exhausts the powers of the understanding and of the will, and it corrupts these two faculties. It exhausts the powers of the understanding and of the will, attaching the one to the consideration and the other to the affection of created things. Understand this, my brothers. The sinner, in committing sin, places his last end in created things, and these creatures being regarded by the sinner as his last end, he necessarily attaches

to them his thoughts and his affections; from which it follows that the powers of these two faculties, which are moreover quite limited in their operations, being exhausted in the consideration and affection of creatures and the vanities of the earth, little or nothing remains of them for the Creator. This is the weakness caused by the exhaustion of these two powers; here now is the weakness caused by their corruption.

The proper effect of sin, says Saint Thomas, is to corrupt these two noble powers, the understanding and the will. The corruption of the understanding is blindness; the corruption of the will is the disorder of its affections. Now sin does both. It blinds the understanding and puts disorder into the will. It blinds the understanding by preventing it from seeing the vanity of earthly things and the misfortune into which it is precipitating itself. It puts disorder into the will: God, who ought to hold the first rank in the heart, no longer has there but the last place, and these two faculties being corrupted in this way, they find themselves excessively weakened and ill-suited to resist the temptations that draw us to sin. Here, then, is the weakness of these two powers for resisting sin. But here now is their strength for resisting grace. It is likewise the effect of sin, which renders this understanding impervious to the light of heaven and this will insensible to the touches of the divine spirit. But as this strength is, properly speaking, nothing but weakness, it is caused in the same way by the exhaustion and the corruption of these two faculties. What is it that renders this understanding impervious and this will insensible? Exhaustion and corruption. An understanding exhausted and corrupted by the consideration of the vanities of the earth cannot open its eyes to consider the beauty of heaven; it is impervious to its light. A will exhausted and corrupted by the love of creatures cannot be touched by the love of the Creator; it is insensible to its attractions. And this, my brothers, is what I call the strength of these two faculties which renders the sinner strong to resist grace. But here is the point of importance. The first sin does it lightly; the second does it more; the third

even more. But habit renders this strength and this weakness extreme. Thus, the more the sinner delays his penance, the more he weakens with respect to sin, the more he fortifies himself against grace. For, do not doubt it, my brothers, this delay produces the habit of sin. Habit, as you know, is formed by the multiplication of acts; by dint of sinning, one becomes accustomed to sin. Now, I have shown you that the delay of penance multiplies sin; it therefore produces the habit of sin, and the more one delays, the more tyrannical this habit becomes. Consequently, the greater becomes the strength and the weakness of the sinner, and by a further and necessary consequence, the greater also is the peril.

On this point I beg you to note carefully that this strength and this weakness which I have just explained to you are not only greater absolutely and in themselves, but also relatively. I do not know whether I shall be fortunate enough to make myself understood. I say, then, that the weakness and the strength of the sinner are not only greater in themselves, and in the sense I have just explained to you, but also with respect to the enemy the sinner must fight, and to the adversary by whom he must be overcome. Who is the enemy the sinner must fight? It is sin: the adversary by whom he must be overcome is grace. To be converted, he must overcome the one and be overcome by the other, he must overcome sin and grace must overcome him. Now here is his great misfortune. He is all the weaker the more he delays resisting sin and converting; I have shown you this. But that is not all. Sin is stronger still, because it is more deeply rooted, because it is more multiplied, because it is defended by the powers of hell, to whom God gives free rein in punishment for this delay. These are sins that the prophet Amos calls strong sins: I have known your many iniquities and your strong sins; that Jeremiah calls hard sins: your sins have become hardened. They are hard and they are strong; they cannot be broken by the hammer of threats, nor softened by the oil of promises. On the other hand, my brothers, the sinner is stronger in

resisting grace, as I have told you. But grace also is weaker in combating the sinner. God withdraws his graces to punish his ingratitude; he gives them no longer in such great number, nor of such strength. This divine sun no longer shines upon this sinful soul except feebly and rarely; it is a winter sun that casts its rays upon the earth only through the clouds that fill the air, sending forth only a languishing and interrupted light.

Ah! wretched sinner, who delays from day to day the remedy of penance, and who sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of vice, do you not see the disaster with which you are threatened? Do you not see the evident danger you place yourself in of never being able properly to do what you delay so long? To convert, you must fight and conquer sin, and how can you hope to do so? You grow weaker day by day, and sin grows stronger. If, now that it is but a shrub, you cannot uproot it, how will you be able to tear it out when it shall be like a great oak? If, now that it is but a thread, you cannot break it, how will you overcome it when it shall have the strength of a cable? That is not all. You must also let yourself be overcome by grace, and how will you be able to, if this grace grows weaker every day, while you become stronger to resist it? If now, in your weakness, you resist the strength of grace, how will you not resist it when it shall be weakened, and you shall have become stronger? Judge, then, whether it is not true that the more you delay your penance, the more the danger increases of never doing it at all.

I shall add, in closing, that to delay one's penance until death is not so much to place oneself in danger of dying in sin as to make that misfortune inevitable for oneself — something I could prove to you, had time permitted, by establishing four great truths. I would tell you, first, that by a just judgment, God does not give these sinners the time to convert to him. How many are struck by apoplexy! How many die in battle or perish in shipwreck! How many die without the sacraments! I would tell you, secondly, that if God

gives them the time, he does not give them the will. This is terrible. Thus it often happens, says the great Augustine, that God forgets at death the one who forgot him during his life. I would tell you, thirdly, that God will indeed give them the will, but not the power, at least not a proximate power. This is no less terrible. They would wish, but they cannot, or they can only feebly. It happens to them as it happened to that usurer of whom the venerable Bede speaks, who cried out in vain: O penance, where are you, penance, where are you? Where are you, repentance? I seek you, I long for you, and I cannot find you. I would tell you, finally, that if God grants them, if you wish, the time, the power and the will, but not the efficacious grace to do good — and such is the penance of most. It is but a plastered penance, one that is on the lips only and not in the heart. They do not leave sin; it is sin that leaves them. If they could recover their health, they would commit it again with the same ease as before, which has led the Fathers of the Church to say that the penance made in one's last illness is itself gravely ill, and that there is little to hope from these kinds of penances.

What is the conclusion of all this, my brothers? It is natural: prompt penance, prompt penance, without delay, as soon as possible. One cannot say it too often, one cannot preach it too often. Do not wait until death. Of a thousand who have lived in sin, scarcely one is found who does not die in it. Do not delay long; the more you delay it, the more you make it difficult. Do not delay it even a single day; you are assured neither of time nor of grace. Today, then, this very moment, secure your salvation; forever break the bonds that attach you to sin; believe that your salvation and your eternal loss are at stake: think what concerns your soul, says Saint Chrysostome.

Father of mercies, strike this assembly with your hand. I strike hearts of stone; it is for you to make the water of compunction spring forth. Grant, O my God, this grace to my hearers; let there not be one among them who does

not today take the resolution to convert to you. This is what I ask in the name and through the merits of your Son. Amen.

ANOTHER EXORDIUM FOR THE SAME SERMON

Behold, a certain ruler came and worshiped him, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead. (Matthew 9)

I cannot, my brothers, behold this ruler of the synagogue prostrate and desolate at the feet of the Son of God, this crowd of people gathered in his house, this noise, this tumult that arises there, these mournful voices, these lamentations, these cries, these tears, without remembering what the great Augustine has said — that men do not know how to weep wisely, with judgment and reason. We weep for the death of the body, which is not a very great evil, and which is often the remedy for great evils, and we do not weep for the death of the soul, which is the greatest and most disastrous of all evils. How strange is this disorder! Although the Savior of the world, in the course of his most holy life, performed an infinity of miracles, we do not read, nevertheless, that he raised more than three dead persons — the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, the son of the widow of Naim, and Lazarus. These miracles, says Saint Augustine, are accompanied by various circumstances which are for us as many admirable instructions given us by the Son of God. The ruler's daughter was just expiring, having only just died, and Jesus needs only a word to restore her life: this teaches us, says this great saint, that it is easy to bring back to grace a sinner who wishes at once to rise from his fall. The widow's son, already in the bier and about to be laid in the earth, is the figure of a man who remains long in his sin. The Son of God did not restore his life with the same ease. It was necessary for this that he let himself be moved by compassion, that he stop the bearers, that he lay his hand upon the coffin, and that he make his voice heard by this dead man, commanding him to rise — which marks for us that it is far more difficult to heal a sinner who has grown old in his sin. Finally, Lazarus, rotting in his tomb, is the figure of a sinner habituated and hardened in his crime. The Son of God must weep, must

shudder within himself, must pray to his Father, must cry aloud to make himself heard by this dead man: Lazarus, come forth — showing thereby how very difficult it is to restore the life of grace to a sinner hardened in his crime. Hear, then, my brothers, the voice of your God, who speaks to you today through mine, and who tells you to come forth promptly from the tomb of your sins. To engage you effectively in this, I shall establish two great truths, and so on.

SERMON ON THE ORDINARY DEFECTS OF CONFESSIONS

When I consider, my brothers, the outward face of the world, when I regard men from without and judge them by their actions; when I see the absolute empire that sin has usurped over hearts, that they have no attachment but to riches, to pleasures, to vanity, pierced with bitter sorrow and carried away by a just zeal, I cry out with the prophet: No, Lord, there is no longer religion among men; corruption is general, iniquity floods the whole earth! But if, under the impression of these sentiments, I enter into the sacred tribunal where sinners must accuse themselves as still more guilty than they appear in the eyes of men, who see only the outside, they present themselves to us under such different characters, they conceal or disguise their disorders so entirely, that they appear to have as much piety, as much good faith, as the Christians of the first centuries. At the sight of so strange a reversal, what could I cry out, with the Fathers, but this: What, then! is confession a comedy in which to appear masked in this manner? Did Jesus Christ give us the power to bind and to loose only to be witnesses of the dissimulation and the deceit of penitents? Let us try, my brothers, to put a stop to a disorder so common and so pernicious, which, for a multitude of souls, turns into poison the salutary remedy that should give them life. Now, I note two causes of this fatal abuse: a lack of examination and a false shame. One does not confess exactly, because one does not examine oneself sufficiently — this will be my first point; one does not confess fully, because one is ashamed to admit one's guilt — this will be the second.

FIRST POINT

The whole life of a Christian ought to be a continual examination of all his actions, of all his desires, and of all his thoughts. Since inconstancy is the true character of the human heart, and since at every moment it forms different impressions within itself, if we lose sight of it for a single instant, we no longer know it. Our thoughts, our desires, become confused in their multiplicity, and our heart becomes an abyss of which we can no longer know more than the surface. Indeed, for lack of this attention to oneself, how many sinners fail to recognize themselves and lose entirely the memory of their crimes! How many sinners who are known to be subject to a thousand disorders, to a thousand bad habits, and who, at the feet of a confessor, do not know what to accuse themselves of! They feel only too keenly, however, through the reproach of a troublesome conscience — if perhaps they are not already hardened — that there lies within them a weight of iniquities, a confused mass of crimes, a corrupt fund of malice. Instead of employing, after the example of David, the day and the night to search out all the folds and recesses of their embittered heart, to enter into judgment with themselves, they content themselves with a hasty examination, which lacks the necessary time; with a blind examination, which attends only to a part of their duties; with a flattering examination, which judges their actions only by the false light of passion and self-love. From this comes an insufficient examination, the fatal source of an infinite number of imperfect confessions. And first, a hasty examination. What is confession? It is an account that must be rendered to God; can one render it without carefully examining every article? It is an admission of all the wrong one has done and is obliged to disclose in all its circumstances; can one do this without gathering full information? It is a judgment one must pronounce against oneself, and which must be annulled before a higher tribunal if it has not been well pronounced; can one take too much time not to be mistaken in it? Having, then, to settle accounts on which

you will be condemned or absolved, according as you have kept them well or ill, the first thing you ought to do is to enter into yourselves and take all the time necessary to examine carefully the disorders of your past life. But what do people do? After months, often after whole years spent in the tumult and the entanglements of the world, one employs to examine oneself an interval that would scarcely suffice to recall properly the actions of a single day. One passes rapidly over a routine of daily sins, and after a discussion of this nature one presents oneself to the priest, one confesses as one has examined oneself. What, then, do we see in the tribunal of penance? Blind men who do not know themselves, dumb men who can only stammer, ignorant men who do not know what they mean to say. What do we hear? Vague accounts, an ill-ordered narrative, a jumble which is often not sin at all, or has no bearing whatever on the sin one means to declare.

In truth, my brothers, do you reflect on this? What! your life is a continual absence of reflection upon yourselves, your life is a life of pleasures, of agitations, of trouble, of movements for the goods and honors of the world, and you pretend that a brief interval, which does not even suffice to calm your temporal anxieties, nor to set aside from your memory the troublesome ideas of a tumultuous world, should suffice to know all the folds and recesses of your heart, to recall to you all your steps, to search thoroughly a conscience you have never properly observed! You pretend to be able, in so little time, to unravel so many plotted intrigues, so many concerted parties of iniquity, so many evil thoughts that escape in an instant, so many unjust desires that vanish almost as soon as they are formed! Ah! you would not think it too much to spend days, weeks, even whole years, unraveling an affair in which a temporal interest is at stake, and you believe that a few moments suffice to deal with an affair in which an eternity is at stake! Strange illusion, which, by depriving sinners of the knowledge of their crimes, renders them all the more criminal. I have employed much time in examining myself, someone will say,

and yet I find nothing criminal in myself. — You have examined yourself for a long time, my brother; I grant it. But on what have you examined yourself? Is not your examination perhaps a blind examination which attends to only a part of your duties? For let us see, and allow me, for your instruction, to descend into a somewhat particular detail. You, clergy, have you examined yourselves on the use of your goods and your time? Have you examined whether you have not squandered in foolish and useless expenses your surplus which belongs to the poor; whether you have not given to gambling, to pleasures, to walking — to say no more — a time that should have been devoted to prayer or to study; whether, finally, you have paid more attention to the revenues of your benefice than to the obligations of your charge? You, men of the law, have you examined whether you have brought all possible exactness to examining the rights of the parties in a case entrusted to you, whether you have not dragged it out in order to multiply the costs, whether you have not often rendered your judgments more out of inclination toward relatives or friends than according to justice, whether you are capable, whether, for want of capacity, you have still presumed to judge? You, magistrates, charged with the public good, and you who are charged with keeping order and putting down disorders — have you examined yourselves accordingly? You, young women of the world, have you examined whether you have always contained yourselves within the bounds of Christian modesty, whether, by your tender airs, your affected charms, you have not been a source of scandal to your neighbor? Have you examined yourselves on all the movements of a heart ruled by a fatal passion, on so many gallantries and familiarities which you allow because they do not seem to you evidently criminal, but which are so delicate and so dangerous? You, fathers and mothers, have you examined yourselves on the good or bad order you have kept in your household, on the good or bad example you have given to your children and to your servants? You, merchants, have you examined yourselves

on the good or bad faith you observe in your trade, whether you have not unjustly withheld, or at least delayed, the wages of your workers whom you have left to languish in their misery, whether you have not obliged them to take from you goods which you sell them dearer than elsewhere? You, servants, workmen, subordinates, have you examined yourselves on the respect and fidelity you owe your masters, whether you have procured their profit as your own, whether you have exactly observed the conditions of your engagement — for example, whether you have not fraudulently measured out the wood, whether you have not cut it too short or too long, whether you have given the pieces of merchandise a just measure, whether you have delivered them at the place and time agreed upon; whether, under some false pretext of not being sufficiently paid or of having suffered some loss, you have not paid yourselves, either by keeping back too much money, or by pilfering and plundering little by little the goods of your masters — today a bit of coal, tomorrow a bit of wood; here a pole, there some grain — which, gathered together, causes a considerable wrong that you are bound to repair? In a word, not to detain you too long, have you, as Christians, examined whether you have ever lost sight of the rules of faith, whether you have ever doubted or spoken ill of its adorable mysteries, whether you have always shown priests the respect commanded by their sublime character, whether you have regarded the earth as your exile, heaven as your only homeland, whether you have not sought your consolations in this world? Reconsider, in the bitterness of your heart, all the omissions of justice and charity you have committed, that inclination toward the joys of the world, you above all who are bound to expiate your past pleasures, to forbid yourselves not only criminal pleasures but even innocent ones. Is it upon these duties, my brothers, that you have examined yourselves? What am I saying? Have you even so much as thought of them? Is it not true, on the contrary, that all your examination bears upon a mass of daily imperfections and trifles with which you are accustomed to

weary the ears of a confessor, without daring to touch upon your favorite sins or to probe the wounds of an embittered heart? After this, boast to us of your supposed diligence in examining yourselves; you are mistaken, you are in error. Ah! not only a hasty examination, but also a blind examination; let us say further, a flattering examination.

There are in man two very different kinds of judges: reason and the Gospel on one side, self-love and passion on the other. Reason and the Gospel are upright judges who assign to each thing the character it deserves; self-love and passion, on the contrary, are flattering judges who excuse the greatest crimes, who approve what is unlawful and condemn what is just.

What must a sinner do to examine himself in a spirit of penance? He must forget self-love and passion, in order to consult only reason and the Gospel. What does he do, on the contrary, most often? He forgets reason and the Gospel, in order to consult only self-love and passion, which, disguising and excusing sins by a thousand false pretexts, persuade him that he is innocent in the midst of the greatest disorders.

What do the Gospel and reason say to an ambitious man who wishes to examine himself? That he must leave all glory to God, despise the esteem and praise of men, not seek distinctions and precedence; that having but a moment to live here below, in comparison with eternity, we ought to flee all that could hold us fast to earth. Ah! if a sinner examined himself according to all these rules, heavens! how many disorders would he find himself defiled with, he who has sacrificed everything to his ambition! But no, these judges are too severe; he seeks out more favorable ones. He consults self-love and passion, which persuade him that such-and-such a means of advancement is a permitted and lawful means, that the desire to raise and distinguish oneself is a laudable restlessness, a glorious wisdom, a stroke worthy of a generous soul and most conformed to reason, and, by the favor of these false lights and these

worldly maxims, he believes himself innocent and excuses himself before God for not being humble.

What do a rich man's reason and the Gospel say to him? That the rich are not the masters of their goods, that they are but the stewards of them, that they may not dispose of them except according to the order of Providence, that they must use them only so far as the decency of their condition demands, that the rest belongs to the poor. But it is not upon these rules that they examine themselves. They close their ears to these decisions, they listen only to their self-love and their passion, which persuade them that their necessities extend very far, that their condition demands great expenses, that all their profusions are not excessive, that it is permissible to use one's own goods. On this foundation of security and according to these damnable maxims, they commit without scruple the abuse of riches, and not believing themselves guilty of it, they do not think of confessing it.

Will you pardon these sins thus forgotten, O my God! and because one will have neglected to seek them out, will you excuse this willful ignorance? I would wish it, my brothers, but I do not wish to flatter you. God is ready to show you mercy, but on what condition? Here it is, figured in Leviticus: I wish to show favor to my people, he says; I will at last have pity on sinners and receive them to pardon. But here is what they must do: let them confess their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers, by which they have sinned against me; let them remember. If, then, they neglect to remember them, Lord, will you not pardon them? If they forget them, then, for want of having examined themselves as they ought, will your grace and your amnesty not be for them? No, replies Saint Augustine, the absolution of sins is granted only on this condition: if it is lacking, there is no absolution; still less if, knowing their sins, a false shame prevents them from declaring them.

SECOND POINT

God, says Saint Chrysostom, has impressed fear and shame upon sin, and has given to confession a holy assurance. The demon, on the contrary, by a strange reversal, gives sinners, when it is a question of sinning, an impudent boldness, and renders them timid and ashamed when they wish to confess: the devil reverses the order of things, giving confidence to sin and shame to confession.

What results from this? That the sinner dares not declare his crime, or declares it only by halves. Renew your attention.

Nothing is more common than to see sinners who, by a shocking temerity, have provoked the wrath of the Almighty and merited hell; who, as Scripture speaks, have made a glory of their sin, and have become shameless in their malice; to see them, I say, turn pale, tremble, blush when they come to the feet of a confessor to accuse themselves. Twenty times they have approached with faltering step, half resolved; twenty times this wretched shame, closing their mouth, has made them leave the holy tribunal guilty of a new sacrilege. You know it, sinners to whom I speak; it is reason itself that has kept you mute for so long. You blush to admit yourselves guilty; you are ashamed to entrust to the ears and to the judgment of a man the sins you would wish to keep forever hidden, to declare to him your evil thoughts, your unjust desires, the most impenetrable movements of your heart. — What shall I say to a confessor, how shall I go about it? For whom shall I be taken in his mind? — Ah! how many detours! how many excuses! how many false pretexts to decline the accusation of one's disorders, to calm oneself! Sometimes they try to persuade themselves that this sin they conceal is not mortal, that it was committed in youth, before the use of reason, that it was done without deliberation and without reflection. Sometimes they believe it will suffice to confess it in general terms, with the help of some ambiguous and veiled words. Sometimes they strive to reassure themselves upon the infinite goodness of God, who

would not wish to damn them for that. They flatter themselves that they can atone for it by some almsgiving or other good works, without its being necessary to declare it — a malicious stratagem of the mute demon who possesses them, an unfortunate and sacrilegious persuasion of a false shame as fatal to the sinner as it is ill-founded.

I say fatal. In wishing to avoid a supposed and passing confusion, what do you do, my brothers? You expose yourselves to suffering an eternal one, a thousand times more unbearable. This sin which you do not wish to declare to a man will be made manifest to the whole universe on the day of the Lord's vengeance. I will discover your shame to all, says God, and they shall see all your baseness. Faithless soul, all the mysteries you have always so cleverly concealed will be seen. Young women of the world, these criminal intrigues, this shameful commerce which you dare not declare to a priest, will be seen. Sinners, these hypocrisies, these secret thefts, these deceits, these false contracts, these forgeries, these disguised usuries, and so many other sins which a false shame prevents you from confessing, will be seen. One or the other is inevitable: either you will discover your sin yourself to the priest, or God will discover it to all men; choose.

I add, ill-founded shame. If one had to confess in the very presence of God, of Jesus Christ, or of the angels, there would be, I admit, some cause for shame at appearing defiled with so many crimes in the presence of such pure spirits. But God and Jesus Christ, though offended, yield their places, not to angels, but to men as weak and frail as yourselves, who will never reveal the least circumstance of what you have told them.

What, then, do you fear, O sinner? Why do you blush when you address yourself to me to confess? I am a man like you, a sinner like you, perhaps a greater sinner than you. Have no shame in confiding your sin to me, since what I know through confession, I know less than what I do not know at all.

We do not carry to the tribunal of penance, as has been told you a thousand times, either thought, or memory, or mouth, or ears of flesh; we hear your miseries only to forget them. We know only too much of them, alas! by ourselves. We carry within us, as I have already told you, a frailty equal to your own; and the more you declare yourselves guilty before us, the more you become the object of our care, of our prayers, and of our tears. The more we know that you need help, the more we press toward the Father of mercies with sighs and vows, according to the full extent of our zeal. No, my brothers, no, we shall not insult your weaknesses, since we hold the place of a Savior who received to pardon the publican and sinful women. Far from increasing your shame, we shall try, on the contrary, to console you and to support you. Courage, then, my brother; courage, my dear sister; do not suffer this mute demon to possess you any longer; do not permit this wretched shame to be the cause of your damnation. Courage — open your mouth. Declare your sin, and heaven is open to you; but declare it candidly, such as it is, without disguising it or diminishing it; and this is a second device of false shame, when the first has not succeeded.

Indeed, we see every day penitents who, to be sure, have too much religion to conceal a crime of which they know themselves guilty, but who have not enough to admit it as it is — faithful imitators, children of Adam, of their unfortunate father. You know it: ashamed of himself after his sin, and unbearable in his own eyes, Adam went to hide beneath a tree, and shame, rendering him ingenious, he made himself a garment of leaves. But finally, constrained to appear to answer for his sin, instead of confessing it humbly, he disguises it, he wraps it up, he suppresses the circumstances, he adds excuses to it, and instead of saying in one word, ‘I have sinned,’ he makes a speech in which he marks his crime only confusedly and tries to diminish it. The woman, he says, whom you gave me, presented me with this fruit, and I ate it. You see, my brothers, instead of unfolding the sins of pride, of disobedience,

of ingratitude, contained in his intemperance, and all more grave than his intemperance itself, he wraps them all up, on the contrary, in this single word: I ate, and he tries to cast all the blame upon his wife: the woman whom you gave me.

Ah! how many confessions resemble this one! How many penitents who, in long speeches, confound and wrap up sins which a confessor scarcely half perceives! How many who enclose several in terms that mark but one, and often the least of them! I have spoken ill of my neighbor, says one; I have grown angry, says another; I have gambled too much, says a third: I ate. But he who has spoken ill, does he add that it was hatred and vengeance that made him speak ill? He who accuses himself of anger, does he add that this anger causes great outbursts in him, disturbs the peace of his family, fills his household with murmuring, renders him unbearable to his neighbors? He who confesses excess at gambling, does he confess that this excess harms his family's interests, causes him to pay his creditors badly, ruins the inheritance of his children, puts him out of a state to give alms? No, he has spoken ill, he has grown angry, he has gambled too much — that is all: I ate.

If he says more, it is to excuse himself, or to cast the blame upon another. He has spoken ill, but without evil intention, and of things already known. He has grown angry, but these were first movements which one cannot restrain. He has gambled too much, but it was without importance and merely to amuse himself.

A wife blames her husband's faults to justify her own ill humor; a husband blames those of his wife; an abused young woman blames the violence of a libertine: the woman whom you gave me gave me of the tree, and I ate.

They go further still. Through an excess of shame, or rather of vanity, one wishes, after the example of Saul, to cover one's sin under the pretext of religion, claiming to offer sacrifice to the Lord. A man who has enriched himself through usury tries to excuse himself by saying that he performed an act of charity in relieving the poverty of the poor through his usurious loans. A father, a mother, a master, a mistress, always given to outbursts of anger in their families, justify it by the obligation of correcting their children and their servants: they are only offering sacrifice to the Lord. A woman always occupied in busying herself with the affairs of others, always attentive to censure their conduct, will say that she speaks of it only out of compassion or out of a holy zeal which cannot bear disorder: she too is only offering sacrifice to the Lord.

Cheats, hypocrites, masked penitents, if it were to a man alone that you were speaking, you would at least have the advantage of having concealed yourselves from your judge. But, as you know, you are speaking to Jesus Christ, who knows all the folds and recesses of your heart, and who commands me today to tell you what a prophet once said to that queen of Israel who, disguised under borrowed garments, wished to pass for someone other than herself. Wife of Jeroboam, said this prophet to her, why do you disguise yourself? Why do you wish to appear other than you are? I have nothing but unwelcome news to tell you. Your husband and your child shall die; your family shall perish miserably. You bring me bread and honey, as though I had need of these gifts; go, go, what I tell you shall come to pass; one does not mock God with impunity.

Let us speak plainly; hypocritical penitents, disguised penitents, why do you wish to appear other than you are? I have nothing but unwelcome news to tell you. These sins which you conceal will not be forgiven; your confession is false and sacrilegious, and you will suffer eternal torments as the penalty for

your dissimulation and your hypocrisy. You bring me an outward appearance of a penitent, a modest composure, as though God were content with these false appearances. Go, go, what I predict to you shall come to pass; one does not mock God with impunity.

Prevent, then, my brothers, the effects of these terrible curses; profit from the moments that remain to you; repair the defect of so many past confessions under the guidance of a wise director; devote yourselves wholly to this affair, the holiest and the most important you can have, says Saint Bernard. Occupy yourselves assiduously in coming to know all your sins by an examination that is neither hasty, nor blind, nor flattering. Never allow a false shame to prevent you from confessing them exactly as they are, in all their circumstances. Then God, who awaits only the moment of a true return in order to restore you to grace, charmed by your sincerity and satisfied with your humiliation, which will be a part of your penance, will pardon your sins both for time and for eternity. Amen.

SERMON ON INDULGENCES

Preached on the Occasion of a Jubilee

The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to heal those who are contrite of heart, and to preach pardon to captives. (Isaiah 61)

Blessed be, my brothers, blessed be the God of Israel, who has come to visit and redeem his people. We no longer receive from afar promises of healing and redemption under the weak and barren figures of a passing law. It is no longer the trumpets of the ancient jubilee that I make resound today in your ears, in announcing to the sick the healing of their ills, to captives the recovery of their liberty, to those burdened with debts, that remission is about to be made them. The shadows have vanished, the figures have passed; the truth has revealed itself entirely. Children, no longer of the slave, but of the free woman, redeemed not with corruptible gold and silver but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we are in a state to enjoy a sweet and honorable liberty. The fatal letters of the old man's bond are nailed with him to the cross. From the side of this God who died there for us have flowed springs of living water, to which we are invited to come and draw with joy. Our debts are about to be discharged, our ills healed, our chains broken: peace shall reign in Israel. The Spirit of the Lord, who speaks through the mouth of the first shepherd of his Church, commands me to announce to you, in the indulgences of this day, a superabundance of graces, of mercy, and of consolation. But to whom does he command me to announce it? To those whose hearts are broken with sorrow: the Spirit of the Lord has sent me to heal those who are contrite of heart, and to preach pardon to captives. Bring here, then, my brothers, neither a spirit of indolence unconcerned to profit from so great a grace, nor a hardened heart incapable of gathering its fruits. Know how to appreciate at its true worth this gift of heaven, and, recognizing its excellence, strive to apply it to yourselves

in its full extent. It is to bring you to these salutary thoughts on the occasion of the jubilee that the Church offers you, that I come today, my brothers, to speak to you of the truth of indulgences and of the effective means of gaining them. You will see, on one hand, what is meant by indulgence, and how solid the doctrine of the Catholic Church is on this point. You will see, on the other, what conditions are indispensably required to gain indulgences: two propositions for which I ask all your attention. My discourse will be less a studied sermon than a simple but solid instruction, and all the more important because this matter is more rarely treated in the pulpit. May heaven second the zeal that animates me, and may you learn not to lose so precious an advantage!

FIRST POINT

What is an indulgence? An indulgence is properly the remission of the temporal punishment that remains for the sinner to undergo, in this life or in the next, after his sin has been forgiven him. Here, in two words, is the essential and capital point of indulgence. To make this clearer, and before proving it, I must suppose certain truths which you, Catholics, to whom I have the honor of speaking, will doubtless agree with me on. I suppose, then, first, that there are two things in sin: the guilt and the penalty. The guilt, or the offense, is the injury done to God; the penalty is the right that God has to punish the sinner, even eternally, if the offense is mortal; for, just as every good work is worthy of reward, so every sin is likewise worthy of punishment. I suppose, secondly, that after the offense and the eternal penalty have been remitted through the sacrament of Penance or through perfect contrition, there often remains still a temporal penalty which God, in order not to relax entirely the rights of his justice, reserves to make the penitent sinner undergo — a truth which the Council of Trent has solemnly decided, and of which Scripture furnishes us with abundant examples. Thus God, at the

entreaty of Moses, pardons the Israelites their murmurings, but condemns them all to die in the desert. Thus Moses himself, although he obtained from God the pardon of his distrust, is nonetheless condemned to die at the sight of the promised land, without being able to enter it. Thus David obtains pardon for his adultery, but the fruit of his sin must be the object of his chastisement: nevertheless, the child shall surely die, the prophet Nathan tells him. God, then, is infinitely merciful, it is true, but he is no less jealous of the interests of his justice; he wills that satisfaction be made for it, at least in part, by this temporal penalty which he substitutes for the eternal penalty that sin deserved. This temporal penalty which he reserves ought, in the order of his rigorous justice, to be paid by satisfactory works in this life, or by purgatory in the next; but, by a special grace, he remits it to us through the indulgence that the Church grants us, and indulgence, once again, is nothing other than the remission of this temporal penalty. I suppose, finally, that there exists in the Church a fund sufficient for this remission: it is the infinite treasury of the merits of Jesus Christ and the superabundant satisfactions of the Saints. These suppositions granted, to prove what I first advanced — that indulgence, I mean plenary indulgence, is an absolute remission of what remains for us to pay to divine justice after our sin has been forgiven us — I establish two principles against two errors that the enemies of indulgences raise against us. It is said that the Church has power only to remit the penalties she herself can impose, but that she cannot remit those we owe to God: it is added that she has never used any other in the first centuries, and that indulgences, as we understand them, are but a novelty of the twelfth century, invented by Pope Alexander the Third, which must consequently be rejected.

And I say that God has indeed given his Church the power to grant us a full remission of the penalties owed both to the Church and to divine justice. I add that this power has been exercised at all times in the Church, and that indulgences, as we understand them, have been in use there from her birth to

the present. These two propositions, set in their true light after what I have supposed, will suffice, I think, both to make you feel the whole grace of indulgence and to convince our separated brethren of their error.

I say, first, that Jesus Christ gave his Church a true power to draw from the treasury of his infinite merits to provide for our needs and to remit to us the penalties we owe to his justice, and which we should otherwise suffer in this life or in the next for our forgiven sins. I prove this invincibly with Saint Thomas by the words of Jesus Christ himself, who says to Saint Peter that he will give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Now, what is it to have the keys of heaven, if not to be able to open it and to be able to remove all that closes its entrance; and what can prevent just souls, on leaving this life, from entering it forthwith, if not the temporal penalty that remains for them to undergo before the door is opened? The Church, then, which in the person of Saint Peter received the keys of heaven, has also received the power to remove this obstacle and to put just souls into possession of glory.

The Savior expresses this power even more evidently when he adds, speaking to Saint Peter, that whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. He excepts nothing; we ought therefore to except nothing. All that can bind a soul and be an obstacle to glory, whether sin or the remainder of sin, all is included under these words: all that you shall loose. We are not, therefore, granting Peter more authority than Jesus Christ himself gave him; and since this authority was not confided to Saint Peter for himself alone, but for the universal Church, since a shepherd belongs less to himself than to his flock, it must have passed on to his successors; and if the flock of Jesus Christ still subsists, if we are of that flock as much as the faithful of the primitive Church, if we have the same shepherd, who is the successor of Saint Peter, it is to him that we must look to absolve us if we are guilty, to break our chains if we are slaves of sin, to release our debts if we are indebted to divine justice,

to lift all the obstacles that close to us the door of heaven. How will he do this? By drawing from the treasury of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and of the superabundant satisfactions of the Saints, applying them to us through indulgence, in satisfaction for what we owe God for our past disorders.

What, then, is the opinion of these new doctors who restrict this admirable power to only those penalties which the Church imposes upon us in the sacrament, by canons or otherwise, and who exclude from it those we owe to the justice of God in the other world? It is false, says my angelic doctor; it is expressly, he adds, against the privilege given to Peter, to whom it was said that whatever he should loose on earth would be loosed in heaven. These self-styled reformers say that the Church's power is only for earth, and Jesus Christ says it is for heaven as well; they say she can remit only the penalties she has the right to impose, and Jesus Christ openly declares that she can remit generally all that is an obstacle to glory. Jesus Christ excepts none, and they dare to except some! Jesus Christ solemnly gives him the keys of heaven, and they dare to snatch them from him! What temerity! Shall I dare say it? What an outrage!

There are among them those who admit without difficulty that God has given his Church the power to remit sins which, before being forgiven, deserved an eternal punishment in hell, and yet they deny that he has granted her the power to remit certain penalties that remain to be paid, not in hell, but for a time in purgatory, after the sin has been forgiven. What contradiction! What a reversal of common sense! If they grant the Church, by virtue of the words of Jesus Christ, the power to save a soul from hell, why would they refuse her that of saving it from purgatory, since this divine Savior has excepted nothing?

Should they not, on the contrary, be astonished that God, having given Saint Peter so absolute a power to absolve every kind of crime, and to deliver

from hell those who had deserved it, should have refused him that of remitting certain penalties infinitely less than the penalties of hell? Let us recognize, then, my brothers, for our consolation and to the confusion of the enemies of this prerogative, that the Church, by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, can remit to us both sin and the penalty of sin; in a word, all that can be an obstacle to us for glory. This is what she claims to do through the indulgence of the jubilee she grants us, and which she has practiced at all times. This is the second proposition I have advanced, on which I would gladly dwell if I were speaking to our separated brethren who accuse the Church of novelty on this point. Going back to her cradle, I would show them these privileged graces, these full amnesties granted by Jesus Christ himself to sinners and sinful women of note, as I have already said. Descending then from the master to the disciples, I would ask them what they think of the conduct of Saint Paul, who remits part of his penance to the man of Corinth guilty of incest, and who declares that if he has granted him any favor, it was in the name and in the person of Jesus Christ. If these are pernicious novelties, I would ask them, invented, as they maintain, in the twelfth century by Pope Alexander the Third, then what did Tertullian claim — Tertullian, who, before falling into heresy, acknowledged that the Church, moved by the prayers the martyrs made for the remission of the penances imposed on penitents, granted them peace; and this peace of which he spoke even then — what is it but what we today call indulgence?

If these are, I say, novelties, do not the writings of Saint Cyprian erase this? In that famous passage where he declares not only that God, by his infinite mercy, can pardon a penitent who begs him with humble confidence, but that he can even approve, ratify, and hold as legitimately obtained what the martyrs asked for him, and what the priests granted him?

I would recall here what the bishops of Africa did at the same time as Saint Cyprian, who hastened the reconciliation of penitents through prompt absolutions. I would add what happened in the time of Arius, when the Catholic bishops, moved by the keen sorrow of certain penitents, shortened the time of their satisfaction, as the Council of Nicaea puts it. Do not the Councils of Laodicea and of Épaone speak the same language? Does not Saint Gregory, according to the report of Guillaume d'Auxerre and Saint Thomas, grant indulgences at the end of the sixth century to those who visited the churches of Rome? Do we not read the same thing of Leo the Third, of Alexander the Second, and so on?

But, it will be said to me, in these examples you cite from tradition and antiquity, it was only a question of the remission of penalties imposed by canons: this proves in no way, therefore, that indulgences, as we understand them, were in use from the first centuries of the Church. And I answer that this reasoning is false in its principle and illegitimate in its consequence. It is false in its principle, since Jesus Christ, the first and principal head of his Church, when canons were not yet decreed, used it otherwise in favor of Saint Peter, the good thief, the Magdalene, and the woman taken in adultery. It is illegitimate in its consequence. Although, in the primitive Church, indulgence was the remission of penalties imposed by canons, this in no way prevents it from having also remitted at the same time the penalties owed to divine justice.

And to prove it, here is how I reason after Saint Thomas. Did not these penalties imposed by the ancient canons serve to appease God's anger, to satisfy his justice, to discharge the penalties of the other life? Yes, without doubt. Let us say, then, likewise, that an indulgence which relaxes for me these penalties imposed by the Church relaxes at the same time those I owe to divine justice, and that I should have to suffer in purgatory. Otherwise, and

this is the second reason Saint Thomas uses against this false opinion, otherwise, I say, the Church would deceive me, would harm me more by granting me indulgences than by not granting them, because in relaxing for me these ecclesiastical penalties, she would expose me in purgatory to harsher punishments which I would certainly have avoided, in whole or in part, by the canonical penalties from which her indulgence absolves me. One must, then, conclude, my incomparable doctor concludes, that indulgence remits, whether before the Church or before God, the penalty of sin that remains after contrition, confession, and absolution, whether confession has been prescribed or not.

"Yes, my brother," said a great bishop of the past century, Joly, Bishop of Agen, "I am as assured — as assured as I am that there is but one God — that if you dispose yourself well to receive the grace of the plenary indulgence that the Church offers you, though you were to remain whole centuries in purgatory, though you were indebted to divine justice for as many temporal penalties as there are grains of sand and drops of water in the sea, they will all be remitted to you, and you shall come forth from the tribunals of penance and from the holy table as pure, as fully freed, as when you came forth from the waters of your baptism." A consoling truth, a Catholic dogma, a favorable remission, an absolute pardon, a holy usage, authorized by the practice of the Church throughout the centuries.

What remains for me, then, to say to you, my brothers, but to exhort you to profit from these graces and these favors which the Church offers you in the name and on behalf of Jesus Christ? You take such scrupulous care of the smallest opportunities for a temporal establishment; you show such eagerness to draw yourselves out of poverty, to enrich yourselves; and in the affair of your salvation, in the spiritual indigence in which you find yourselves, in the powerlessness in which you are of discharging so many debts that make you

debtors to divine justice, will you remain cold, languishing, insensible to your loss or to your gain? What are you thinking of, the patriarch Jacob once said to his children? There is grain for sale in Egypt; why do you not hasten to profit from this opportunity? Go quickly and buy what we need, for fear we die of famine. Things today, my brothers, are in a better state. The painful journeys from the land of Egypt to that of Canaan are spared you. There is no need either to pass into barbarous lands, or to make long and perilous journeys to draw you out of the spiritual indigence in which you are. The storehouses of the Father of the family are open: the charitable and generous Joseph offers you gratuitously what he has amassed for you. Come and draw from the treasures and the fountains of your divine Savior. Come and seek in his infinite merits wherewith to discharge your debts. It is on his behalf and in his name that I invite you to it today: the Spirit of the Lord has sent me to heal those who are contrite of heart, and to preach pardon to captives. But, finally, what must one do to gain the indulgence?

SECOND POINT

Two things are indispensably necessary in order to have a share in the indulgence. To accomplish the works prescribed by the vicar of Jesus Christ is the actual disposition; to be in a state of grace is the habitual disposition. Let us set each of these in its proper light.

I say, first, that one must accomplish the works ordained by the bull, such as praying, giving alms, visiting the churches, and so on. One must accomplish them really; intention and will, however sincere, would not suffice: one must accomplish them all; a single omission is enough to deprive you of all right to the indulgence: one must accomplish them at the appointed time, so that, joined together, they may have more force and virtue: one must accomplish them in a holy manner, for if, instead of being pious actions, they

become vicious, even venially, through some evil circumstances you mix into them, you lose the indulgence.

Let me explain. You are commanded, in order to gain the indulgence, to say, for example, certain prayers or give certain alms. You say these prayers with a mind willfully distracted, you give these alms out of vanity; the grace of the indulgence is not for you. It is granted only on condition that you satisfy God in some measure through the good works prescribed to you. They become evil in your hands: one does not satisfy God by evil actions, even if they are but venial sins. One must, then, do them in a holy manner, in a spirit of penance, so that, by this kind of compensation, they may serve you in place of a fuller and more severe penance.

But does it suffice, to gain the indulgence, to accomplish these works? No, my brothers; one must further be in a state of grace, and it is for this that I ask all your attention. Indulgence is a remission of the penalties that remain to be undergone after the sin has been forgiven. It does not grant pardon; it presupposes it. Now sin is remitted only by the infusion of grace. Indulgence, then, is a favor that is granted only to the just and to the friends of God, and it is grace that gives us these glorious qualities. The Church invites, it is true, sinners to participate in the indulgence, but she admits only converted and reconciled sinners; she excludes the hardened and the impenitent. If you are of that number, my brothers, it is not for you that she opens her treasures; so long as you remain in this sad state, so long as you are enemies of God and children of wrath, there is no indulgence for you. God is the master of his gifts, to bestow them on whom he wills and on the conditions he wills. Now the principal condition, in order to profit from this one, is that you be clothed with sanctifying grace and with the character of his beloved children.

From this incontestable truth, here are the consequences I draw, which you must carefully note. Since one must be in a state of grace, one must

therefore renounce all sin, for grace and sin are incompatible — first consequence. This renunciation must be absolute, sincere, effective, and such as it ought to be to put the sinner in a position to find grace before God: without this, nothing is more useless than the grace of the indulgence, or rather, without this, there is no indulgence at all. Since one must renounce all sin, it suffices, then, to have a conscience burdened with a single mortal sin to be incapable of gaining the indulgence — second consequence. I say further, and I add that it suffices to be, before God, guilty of a single venial sin to which one is still secretly attached, in order not to be able to gain it in its full extent. For at the very least one cannot gain it with respect to the venial sin whose stain is not yet effaced, according to this incontestable principle of my angelic doctor, that God remits the penalty of sin to no one whose guilt has not first been remitted. Finally, since every sin must be forgiven, one must therefore be truly contrite and penitent. For sin is forgiven only to those who detest it, and in the measure that they detest it — third consequence, and it is in express terms what the bulls state: that the indulgence is granted to the truly contrite and penitent. Now, on this, let each one examine himself to know whether he is in a state to lay claim to the grace of the indulgence, and that thereby he may discern those who gain it from those who do not gain it.

One sees during these holy days a great number of Christians who, to have a share in the indulgence, appear touched with contrition, give public signs of it, practice works of penance up to a certain point, throng in crowds to the tribunals, confess their sins, strike their breasts, even shed tears; but, amid this crowd, and under these specious appearances, are there many true penitents? You know it, my God, you from whom nothing is hidden and who penetrate to the depths of hearts; you know whether the number of penitents corresponds to the abundance of your mercies. What I know is that your mercies, abundant though they are, are even in this time of salvation limited and entirely reserved for those whose contrition is sincere and solid; what I

know is that false penance must expect from you neither grace nor remission, at any time. True penitents are those who are not content merely to weep for their sin, but who forsake its occasion, who repair its pernicious effects, who put an end to its scandal, who seek out its remedies and submit themselves to them in good faith. These are the proofs of an unsuspect contrition; these, without excepting any, are the absolutely required dispositions for the indulgence of which I speak. Now how few fulfill faithfully, fully, and exactly all these duties, and, by a necessary consequence, how many are deceived and deceive themselves in the vain hope they have of having received the Lord's blessing!

You, my brothers, to whom I have the honor of speaking, have you received it — you, I say, who have come to accuse your sins without attention, without examination, without sorrow; you who, with a corrupted conscience, an embittered soul, with impure eyes and impure hands, with a heart full of envy and swollen with ambition, with fine words and imposing protestations, wrest from the ministers of the living God a hasty absolution; you who, under the pretext of some fasts in which your sensuality will have been less mortified than interrupted, of some visits to churches, of some prayers in which your feet and your lips will have had more part than your heart, of some almsgiving where hands, either avaricious or impure, will have been ill-suited to redeem your sins, believe you have done all that must be done to gain the indulgence. Have you done it indeed? You flatter yourselves that you have; deceived and deceiving penitents. Yes, I have done it, you say boldly, like a reprobate king who once cried out, ‘I have fulfilled the word of the Lord.’

You have done it, my brothers; whence, then, comes this confused noise of animals I hear? What has become of this Agag? Is he dead? Have you not spared his life? No, no, you have not done what the Lord willed you to do. Perhaps you have immolated to a nascent fervor a flock of petty sins, of light

engagements you care little about, of odd friendships you begin to weary of. But this old habit, this dominant sin, this Agag — what has become of it? Is it not as alive as it was before?

Perhaps you have sacrificed certain passions to others that were stronger, being unable to satisfy them all — the passion for gambling to your avarice, your avarice to your ambition, your ambition to impurity, impurity to the fear of drawing troublesome affairs upon yourself. Ah! my brothers, if this is merely changing objects, it is not changing the heart, and without a change of heart there is no true contrition, no sincere penance; consequently no peace with God, no grace, no indulgence for you.

And after this, let no one come and accuse the Church of laxity in her discipline; let no one come and tell me that the frequent indulgences she grants turn sinners away from penance and entirely extinguish its spirit. Is it, then, to authorize laxity, is it to turn the sinner away from penance, to engage him, by the hope of the pardon of his sin, to leave it, to flee its occasions, to repair its disorders, to detach himself from the creature and from himself in order to return to God? A Christian who reasons according to the Catholic maxims I have just laid down — is he ignorant that indulgence engages him to that which is most difficult, most heroic, and greatest in religion, namely, a true conversion? Does he not understand that in order to dispose himself for the grace of indulgence, there is no violence he must not do to himself, no passion he must not sacrifice, no attachment he must not break, no dangerous commerce he must not forbid himself? Why? Because all this belongs to the essence of a true conversion. Does he not know, finally, that, being unable ever to be assured whether his penance has been genuine, and consequently whether he has gained the indulgence, his only resource, in this distressing uncertainty, is to continue always doing penance, as if there had been no

indulgence for him? These, then, are not the indulgences that lead to laxity, but the abuse that sinners make of indulgences.

It is true that the Church's practice today differs from that of the first centuries, that she no longer maintains between outward penance and sin that severe proportion once observed. But if she has changed her conduct in this respect, has she for that changed her spirit? What she did in the first centuries, she did wisely; does what she does in later times mark less wisdom? If, through indulgences, she has softened the severity of the ancient penances, she has done what she could and what she ought to have done; she has had regard for the weakness of her children, she has taken into account the cooling of their charity, and, for fear of losing everything, she has saved the remnants of the ancient fervor by softening, as much as she could, the yoke of a discipline which most would perhaps have entirely shaken off.

Let whoever wishes, then, persist in the severity of his own morality; it is not a question of pushing it to despairing extremities: it is not a question of always crying out that one must steep one's bread in tears like David, put on sackcloth and cover oneself with ashes like the king of the Ninevites. A severe and frightening morality of this kind ordinarily costs nothing but the trouble of preaching it. It is rather a question of considering things as they are, as the Church, ever guided by the Holy Spirit, has judged fitting to dispose them, in order to relieve her children of their debts through the dispensation of the heavenly treasures entrusted to her, which she opens to them through indulgences, since above all she always leaves them free to accomplish what is most difficult and most essential in penance.

For I have said it, my brothers, remember it: indulgences are granted to us not that we should relax in our duties, nor that we should seek in God's goodness a pretext for our disorders, but so that, at the sight of this infinite mercy and in the hope of a prompt and full pardon, we might return sincerely

to him, conceive a lively sorrow for having offended him, and become true and sincere penitents. We grant peace, said Saint Cyprian, but to whom? Not to those asleep who love rest and slumber, but to those who watch and who promise to keep better guard over themselves. We give peace; but woe to us if we gave it to favor softness and to foster the pleasures of sinners! We give it only that they may take up arms again and fight with more courage than they have shown before; we give it only to captives who seriously wish to break their chains, as they have their hearts broken with sorrow: it is on these conditions, I say, my brothers, that the Church grants you peace, and that I come to announce to you the indulgence: the Spirit of the Lord has sent me to heal those who are contrite of heart, and to preach pardon to captives.

Do you wish, then, to profit from it, my brothers? Labor seriously to detach yourselves from all useless objects, to purify yourselves of every stain, to convert to God with your whole heart. The thing is not so easy, I admit, especially for a sinner grown old in habit; but, after all, is it not a small matter compared with the graces that divine goodness offers you and the penalties it relaxes for you? Approach, my brothers, in good faith, a God who acts so generously toward you. He offers you his treasures; give him at least your heart. On this condition he promises to heal your ills, to break your chains, to discharge your debts, and, should you die in this state, to receive you without delay into the abode of his glory. Amen.

SERMON ON THE SPIRITUAL TREASURY OF INDULGENCES

There exists in the Church a spiritual treasury. This treasury is an assemblage of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and of the superabundant satisfactions of several saints, who, having suffered more than God required of them, have left of their superabundance a fund to enrich us and to discharge us toward God for what we owe to his justice. If, in the natural body, the members, by the union they have with one another, render mutual assistance to each other, how should the Church militant, united to the Church triumphant and forming with her a single body, not receive help from her in her pressing needs? How should the abundance of the one not make up for the poverty of the other, as the Apostle puts it? If in kingdoms and in well-governed states there are storehouses and reserve funds, which are opened in times of great need to provide for the public misery, would the Church, guided and enlightened by the Spirit of God, be the only one whose children would find no resources in their spiritual indigence? Adorable Savior, you have had the charity to provide for this. It is for us that you came into the world; it is for us that you suffered the cruelest torments. You could well, O my God, have spared yourself these sufferings; you could well have spared yourself mortifying yourself for us, exposing yourself for us to all the calumnies and all the ill-treatment of your enemies, sweating blood and water for us, leading a poor and painful life for us, ending it ignominiously for us on an infamous gibbet. A single one of your tears, a single one of your sighs, a single drop of your blood, would have sufficed to redeem a million worlds.

Yet your infinite goodness did not wish to stop there, and where sin abounded, your grace has abounded still more. Instead of a single drop of blood, you shed a deluge; instead of a single tear, you poured forth torrents;

instead of a single sigh, you sent up great cries to your Father, and he heard you for the reverence you showed him in thus annihilating yourself, and for the merit and excellence of your adorable person. Behold, my brothers, superabundant graces, surpassing satisfactions for us; and Jesus Christ having no need of them for himself, shall they be useless? It would be an impiety to believe it and a blasphemy to say it. You will compose of them, O my God, the treasury of your Church, a treasury which she will open to us at the time of indulgences.

Add to this, my brothers, to these infinite merits of Jesus Christ, the superabundant satisfactions of the saints. They enter likewise into this spiritual treasury, not indeed in the same rank nor as a principal cause, since there has never been but one God-man who, in this capacity, wrought our salvation and is the true and sole Redeemer; nor even as absolutely necessary, since the merits of Jesus Christ are more than sufficient for this remission; but, as Pope Clement the Fifth has judiciously observed, Jesus Christ wills to do the saints the honor of associating them with himself, in order to give more weight to their merits, and to make known to us therein the economy of his mercy and of his justice: of his mercy, by which they have done more than was necessary to accomplish the work of their predestination; of his justice, which, unwilling to leave anything useless and unrewarded in them, unites these superabundant satisfactions to his own, to compose the treasury of his Church.

To conceive this better, and to forestall at the same time what the enemies of indulgences object to us, one must suppose a certain principle of theology, that good works can be at once meritorious and satisfactory. Insofar as they proceed from a supernatural principle, I mean grace and charity, they are meritorious; insofar as they are painful and laborious, they are satisfactory, so that not only do they contribute to the salvation of the one who performs

them, but they can also be useful to others who, by a secret operation of God's mercy, profit from them when they are superabundant. Thus, when a poor man, to whom I have given alms, fasts or prays for me, I doubtless profit from these good works; they satisfy in part for my debts. This poor man, however, loses nothing of his merit for that. On the contrary, it is greater than if he acted for himself alone, because this action, being pleasing to God and useful to his brother, makes him exercise a double charity toward God and toward his neighbor. I say, then, that the good works of the saints, as meritorious, have sanctified and saved them. But as satisfactory, when they go beyond the measure marked out by the Father of the family, their fruits can be applied to those with whom the bonds of faith and charity unite them. The merit of these saints is limited to themselves personally. But if their measure is too full, would not something of it overflow upon us? If they have paid beyond what they owed, could we not acquit ourselves through their abundance, we who scarcely ever pay all that we owe? And if it is true that, in the new covenant, there is more help and more grace than in the old, may I not say to God what the royal prophet once said to him: ‘I enter, O my God, into participation in the good works of all who fear you’? If unfortunately I am in debt, I shall be able to find in the fund that has been left me wherewith to satisfy my creditor. Yes, happier than Benjamin, I shall find in my sack the grain I need to be nourished, and the money that Joseph, my generous brother, has placed there. Happier than those who guarded the baggage and who, by David's order, shared the spoils with those brave soldiers who had defeated the enemies, I shall profit from the combats and the victories of so many apostles, confessors, virgins, and martyrs, whose invincible strength has conquered the world and sin, and has confounded the rage of tyrants. Like Ruth, who gathers the ears of wheat that the reapers, by Boaz's command, had let fall on purpose, I shall gather the precious remains that so many great saints have left me of their real abundance — from whose generous hands, by an express order from

on high, these spiritual ears have flowed, wherewith I may relieve myself in my indigence and in my hunger.

SERMON ON THE MOTIVES FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

You shall love the Lord your God. (Luke 10)

If faith, my brothers, is the foundation of the Christian religion, love is the bond of its perfection. If faith raises us up to God, love unites us to him. It is this love that constitutes the whole happiness of nature, the whole perfection of grace, the whole consummation of glory. If the martyrs hold one of the first ranks among the saints, it is because, in dying for God, they gave him the most sensible marks of their love, and if among the blessed spirits the Seraphim draw nearest to him, it is because they are the most inflamed with love — a love which, coming from God and terminating in God, is so vast, says Saint Augustine, that it embraces here below all the virtues. What is fortitude, this Father asks, but a courageous love that suffers all things for God? What is temperance, but a sober love that deprives itself of every criminal pleasure for God? What is justice, but a faithful love that renders to God all that it owes him? Need I say more? This love is the very Spirit of God, and if charity is poured out in our souls, it is this divine Spirit that gives it to us. How honorable and how advantageous it is for us, then, to be called to a love that must constitute our happiness and our glory!

God, as sovereign master, commands us to love him with our whole heart, without reserve and without division, and he commands it under pain of an unhappy eternity. This alone, my brothers, should suffice to engage us to observe exactly this law of love. But this sovereign master, who wishes to be served freely, and more for his own sake than for the sake of the punishments with which he threatens us, makes us find in himself motives yet more powerful for loving him with that perfect love he asks of us.

Love is a movement, an inclination of the will toward its object, and this movement is all the more violent as this object appears more lovable. Love,

says Saint Augustine, ought to follow the worth of the thing loved. You love a pound of gold; you will love two pounds still more: the greater the value, the greater ought to be the love. Now, what object more lovable and more worthy of our ardor than the Master whom we adore? He is God, and he is our God; God by his infinite perfections, our God by his continual benefits. God by his infinite perfections, he deserves to be loved; our God by his continual benefits, he engages us to love him. As God, he deserves our heart; as our God, he engages and draws our love. Can we refuse it to so perfect and so good a master?

FIRST POINT

The idea of God carries within itself, among pagans as among Christians, the idea of the first author of all good. It is not only to Moses that God said: I am who am; I am wholly good. It is also to the philosophers that he has made known, through reason, that he is the good, goodness and beauty by essence, the primitive and original good of all goods; so that there is in no good anything useful, brilliant, agreeable, or important, no trait, no characteristic of goodness and beauty, that is not more perfectly in God than it is in the creature itself, and than it appears to our eyes. For this good which attracts your attention and often your admiration — how could it not be in God, since God is its author, and since no one produces, outside himself, anything but what he contains within himself? How, I say, could this good which God produces not be more eminent and more perfect in God, since every work, whatever it may be, however earthly and coarse it appears outwardly, exists in the mind of the workman, spiritual and alive with the very life of the workman? The work of God, consequently, produced from the idea of God, is divine in the idea of God, living with the life of God. What is more beautiful, more charming than the stars, than the sun? You admire them, says Saint Augustine. They are luminous bodies, but material in themselves. Admire them in God; it is there

that they are spirit and life. You love beauty in creatures? Love it in God; it is there that it is spirit and life. You love riches and glory. Love them in God; the one and the other are the ornaments of his palace. You love pleasures. Love them in God; it is he who is the source of the purest joys with which he inebriates those who love him. In a word, my brothers, whatever goods you love in creatures, these are but feeble participations, faint outpourings of that plenitude, of that ocean, of that infinity of goods which is in God. All that God is, he is infinitely, perfectly, without limitation. Is it a question of his power? We say he is all-powerful. Of his knowledge? He knows all. Of his goodness? It is infinite. Of his extent? He is immense. Of his duration? He is eternal.

Do you find, my brothers, do you find on earth anything so lovable? Forgive me, my God, a comparison that revolts reason itself. But finally, if it is true, my brothers, if you agree, if you feel that God alone deserves your heart; if you recognize that all that is good in this world is unworthy of your love; that its joys are steeped in bitterness, its pleasures in sorrows, its beauty fleeting, its glory vain, its friendships deceitful, its treasures perishable and fleeting; in a word, that this whole colossus of pride and vanity which strikes and seduces your senses has feet of clay, which the least breath of wind overthrows and topples; if you have so often experienced that your love for all these false goods has been followed only by regret, that the love of God alone constitutes man's happiness; if, I say, you agree with all this, as you must agree, where is your good sense, where is your reason, where is your religion, if you do not love God, if you love something else even along with God? Alas! You would be in despair at dying without loving him; why, then, do you not love him during life? The first lesson given you in your religion is that you were on earth only to know and to love God. Would you dare say that you do not know him, but can you say that you love him? He alone deserves, nevertheless, your love, because he is God; he deserves it further because he is our God.

SECOND POINT

The prophet made it a subject of delight to have known that God was his God. This knowledge, indeed, says Saint Augustine, is an eminent science, not that of knowing that God is God, but of knowing and thoroughly understanding that he is our God. He is so much ours, it seems, that he seems, so to speak, to be God only for us. He gives us all that he has, all that he is, all that he has done, all that we are. He loves us in every state and in every order. In the order of nature, he gives us a whole world which he created only to be subject to us and to serve our needs. In the order of grace, he gives us all in Jesus Christ, who devoted himself to torments and to death to restore life to us. In the order of glory, he must give us a God in three persons to make us happy throughout eternity. By a first benefit, he has made us like himself: this is creation. By a second, he has lowered himself even to make himself like us; this is redemption. By a third, he has annihilated himself even to making himself like the common food of bread and wine, to make his body and his blood serve as nourishment for our souls; this is communion. By a fourth benefit, which is meant to crown all the others, he wills to be but one with us in heaven, to make us live with his life, happy with his happiness, glorious with his glory, immortal with his immortality.

To these common benefits, add those that are particular to you. You could have been born of idolatrous parents, or been raised in the bosom of error: God has caused you to be born in the bosom of the Church. How many helps has he not provided for you at every period of your life? With how many graces has he not favored you in the very time when you deserved none? From how many troublesome misfortunes has he not delivered you? The health, the time you enjoy, are effects of his liberality. To whom else do you owe this success, this prosperity, the very fruit of your misfortunes? None among you, in the end, but expects still greater graces from this same goodness. Ah!

Christians, how, after all this, can you refuse your heart to so good a God? How do you find it so hard to love him? He owes you nothing, and he gives you everything. We owe him everything, and we give him nothing. We have a horror of the name of ingrate toward whoever does us good, and we feel no shame of it toward God. If a stranger or an unknown person had rendered me the least of all the services I receive at every moment from God, I would feel a tender gratitude toward him, though I had never seen him, though I should expect nothing more from him. Is there, then, only you, O my God, who, by dint of titles and benefits, cannot win a heart that we give, that we lavish upon everyone else? Ungrateful creatures that we are! Has God not done enough to deserve your heart, Moses asked the people of Israel? Are new benefits needed? Are new miracles needed? Have you forgotten these suspended floods that delivered you from your enemies, this manna sent down from heaven to nourish you, and so many other wonders that God has wrought? Foolish people, insensate as you are, laden with so many benefits, witnesses of so many marvels, you love anything else rather than him! When one reflects a little seriously on so unreasonable a conduct, the mind is indignant and rebels against the heart. For, in the end, I ask you, along with Saint Thomas of Villanova: if you had in your house a vile slave, the outcast of the world, who loved you, you would love him too, and if someone asked you why you love such a one, you would answer: I love him because he loves me, and because he takes my interests to heart.

Ah! Christians, cries out this Father at this point, you love this vile slave, and you love him with justice, because he loves you, and you would not love your God, your Creator, your Redeemer, who has an infinite love for you! What crime more enormous, what ingratitude more black! Tell me further, continues this Father, if this vile slave had given himself over to death on an infamous gibbet to spare you that punishment, would you not love him still more, and would you not have for him regard as for your liberator? Yes,

without doubt, or you would be the most ungrateful of men. Why, then, unworthy sinner, do you not do for your God what you would do for so contemptible a creature? Why do you not love with all your heart a God who loves you first, who loves you with an eternal love, who overwhelms you with his benefits, who has redeemed you at the price of his blood, and who wishes to give himself wholly to you for an eternity? What crime greater than this, what ingratitude more excessive?

Let us awaken, my brothers, at this voice; let us come forth from this drowsiness that attaches us to the fragile goods of the earth. Let us not wait for this sleep to be broken by nature; it will no longer be time, at death, to begin loving God. Let us say from now on, with the great Augustine, let us say more with the heart than with the lips: "Woe to the rash soul which, in withdrawing from God, could flatter itself with being happy and with finding outside him something better than himself! Woe to whoever does not love God! Woe to whoever loves along with God something that does not lead to God, or that he does not love for God! Alas! Lord, what am I to you, and what are you to me, that you should honor me with the command to love you, and threaten me with burning in the fire of your wrath if I do not burn with the fire of your love? Is it not a great enough misfortune, or rather is it not the height of misfortune, not to love you with all our heart? Yes, my God, I confess it, but too late. Too late do I begin to love you, O beauty so ancient and so new! Ah, Lord, come, come now into my heart; it is wholly yours. Reign there as sovereign, possess it without division, that I may possess you in like manner in blessed eternity. Amen.

DOGMATIC SERMON
ON THE REAL PRESENCE.

Preached at Maastricht, before the Count of Tilly, Governor of that City, and a great Number of Catholics and Calvinists.

"There stands in your midst one whom you do not know."
(John 1)

MY LORD,

These are the words that the divine forerunner addressed to the Jews who did not recognize the Son of God, though he stood in their midst. "The one you have awaited for so many centuries," he told them, "for whom your fathers sighed, whose coming they strove to hasten by their vows and their prayers—that one, I say, has descended from heaven. He is in your midst; you have him present, and you do not know it. He is a treasure that you possess but do not enjoy, for lack of knowing him; a happiness that you do not taste, because you do not believe in it; an infinite good that could make you happy, but which is useless to you because you do not know its worth: there stands in your midst one whom you do not know."

How many among my hearers, Catholic or not, would I not have the right to address with the same words: There stands in your midst one whom you do not know? Catholic people, you have a God present in your midst in the sacred sacrament of our altars, and you do not know him, or you know him only imperfectly; your faith is weak and languishing. It is a faith of speculation, not of practice: there stands in your midst one whom you do not know. You, gentlemen, the so-called Reformed, you do not know him at all; you even count it a crime to believe in him. Yet he is in your midst, this hidden God; he is in this tabernacle; he is your savior there, if you believe in him; he is your judge there, if you deny him: there stands in your midst one

whom you do not know. It is, then, to revive the languishing faith of some, and above all to inspire it in others, that I undertake today to prove to you the real presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and that, raising my voice, I cry out as the divine forerunner did: there stands in your midst one whom you do not know.

But since it would be impossible to gather, in a single discourse, all the proofs of the truth I am putting forward, I shall confine myself only to those drawn from Scripture, to which our adversaries, forced to abandon everything else, seem to have made their last refuge. They take it, in this question as in all others, as the sole rule of their belief. Very well, I accept the condition today, and we are now agreed on the weapons and the judges of our dispute. I ask of them only one thing, and it is too just for them to be able to refuse it: that they deign to listen to me without prejudice, and without pretending to twist the words of the sacred text into meanings far removed from their sense.

Jesus Christ, gentlemen, spoke of the Eucharist in three different places in Scripture: in the sixth chapter of Saint John, in the three other Gospels, and in Saint Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. My discourse, then, will be nothing but the development of these three propositions: in Saint John, the Savior promised to give us his flesh truly to eat—the first proposition; in the three other Gospels, he fulfilled his promise—the second proposition; and he confirmed both the one and the other by the testimony of Saint Paul—the third proposition.

Holy Spirit, if ever I had need of your help, it is at this moment, when it is a matter of defending the interests and the glory of that adorable body which you yourself formed from the purest blood of Mary. May this incomparable Virgin obtain your enlightenment for me; I ask it of you through her intercession: Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT.

I enter, then, upon my subject by setting before you first the promise that Jesus Christ made to give us his body and his blood. It is expressed in the sixth chapter of Saint John in these terms: “The bread that I shall give is my flesh, which shall be given for the life of the world… My flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink.” On this I must make three reflections, which are so many invincible proofs that these words must be understood literally of the true body and the true blood of the Son of God. I draw the first from the manner in which he prepares his hearers to receive the promise; the second from the comparison he makes between this gift he promises us and the manna; the third from the impression these words made on the minds of the Capernaites and of his disciples.

As to the first, he prepares his hearers for the miracle he is about to promise them by that of the multiplication of the loaves and by a sublime discourse on faith. Now, I ask: if there is nothing in this mystery but bread and wine, if the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present only figuratively, was it necessary to dispose minds in this way by the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves? Was it necessary, before this magnificent promise, to press so strongly upon the excellence of faith, to demand so submissive a spirit, and to promise eternal life to those who, closing their eyes to human reasoning, would open them to a sovereign authority which can do more than our understanding can grasp? “This is the work of God,” he tells them, “that you believe.”

The second reflection concerns the preference that the Savior gives to the body he promises us over the manna that God had given the Jews in the desert. What does he answer his apostles when they ask him whether the bread he promises them is something more excellent than the manna their fathers had eaten? “Our fathers ate manna in the desert.” He answers them that no

comparison can be made between these two gifts, and that what he promises them is as far above manna as that which gives life is nobler than that which cannot prevent death. Your fathers, he tells them, ate manna in the desert, and they are dead; he who eats of this bread will live forever: “Your fathers ate manna in the desert, and they died… if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

What do you say, gentlemen, to this parallel between these two gifts, both great, both remarkable, both singularly useful in their different times? For my part, I maintain that it is impossible for the advantage he gives our sacrament over manna to hold up, if it contains only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Manna was miraculous in its production; it was formed by the ministry of angels. It had something singular in its preservation; it resisted the action of fire and everything that could spoil or corrupt it. Its effects were nothing less than prodigious; it had the taste of every kind of food and drove out every disease from the body. Bread and wine have none of these advantages. They are products of the earth, formed, or at least prepared, by human hands, subject to corruption, incapable of any miracle. All they have in common with manna is that they signify, even more imperfectly, the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. If, then, the Savior assures us that the bread he promises is infinitely nobler and more precious than manna, and yet manna represents the body of the Son of God better than mere bread would, is it not evident that the Eucharist he promises us is something more excellent than bread and manna together? Now, what can it be more than this, if not what he tells us in formal terms—his body and his blood? I insist no further on this comparison. Whoever examines it without prejudice will conclude, unless he takes the words of Jesus Christ in a sense contrary to their own meaning, that he necessarily promises us his true body and his true blood; that he did not give in figure what he promises so solemnly to give us in reality; otherwise we must say either that he wished to deceive us, or that he was

unable to carry out what he had promised. Now, either the one or the other is a horrible blasphemy.

Finally, the third and principal reflection I make on these words of the Savior of the world is that all those who were present understood them as referring to the reality of his body and his blood, and they understood them rightly. That they understood them as referring to the reality of his flesh is evident. This is what led some to dispute among themselves and to ask, "How can he give us his flesh to eat?"; others to cry out, "This is a hard saying, and who can hear it?"; and others, finally, to abandon him: "After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." If they had understood that he intended to give them only the figure of his body, or to have them eat it only through faith, there was nothing there that could have shocked or scandalized them, or driven them to desertion. It is evident, then, that those who heard these words understood them as referring to the reality of his body. No one, I think, disputes this, and that is not the difficulty. I have added that they understood them rightly, and in the sense intended by Jesus Christ. That is what is now in question. Here is how I prove it; pay attention, gentlemen, for the proof is unanswerable.

If the Capernaites and the disciples who heard Jesus Christ's promise concerning the reality of his body had misunderstood it, if Jesus Christ had intended only to promise them the sign and the figure, would this loving Savior, who by a single word could have undeceived them, have left them longer in error? Would he not first have removed their scandal? He who came into the world to dispel the darkness of falsehood and to make truth triumph—would he have failed to give, on this occasion, all the clarification that so new and until then unheard-of a promise demanded? He, finally, who came to give men examples of uprightness and sincerity, would he have wished to deceive them and act as an impostor?

For it is characteristic of impostors and of men of bad faith, when they promise something, to exaggerate it and to give the impression that they are giving more than they intend to give. On the contrary, good faith and sincerity require that an honest man make his promises in clear terms, that he understate his benefit rather than exaggerate it, especially when he sees that the person to whom he is promising expects what he has no intention of giving, and that from this false persuasion great disorders will arise. Thus, you promise someone to give him a house. He understands the picture of that house which you have had painted. Yet you see this man, to whom you speak, persuading himself that you truly intend to give him a house. You foresee, moreover, that from your misunderstood promise disputes and lawsuits will be born. In this case, do not good faith, charity, and even justice oblige you to tell him that he misunderstands, and that it is only a house in painting that you are promising him? Now, Jesus Christ promises his flesh to be eaten. He sees that the Capernaites, his apostles, and his disciples take this promise literally, and that they are scandalized to the point of abandoning him because of it. I say more: he foresees that in the centuries to come, because of this belief, disputes and quarrels will arise that will trouble his Church. Should he not, then, have undeceived their minds, explained himself, and said to them: “My children, you misunderstand my thought. It is not my body, it is only the figure of my body that I promise you”? But, O triumph of the truth! Far from acting in this way, far from using any modification, correction, or explanation to undeceive them and lift their scandal, he employs still stronger and more energetic expressions to confirm them in their belief.

First, he repeats his first words and gives them new weight by the command and the redoubled oath he adds: “Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.” I swear to you, in truth, that if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and if you do not drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.

Second, as if he had feared he had not sufficiently explained himself in saying that his flesh is food, he adds that it is truly food, and that his blood is truly drink: “My flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink.”

Third, he had used the word bread before; but so as not to give occasion for establishing an error on this word, he adds that it is bread come down from heaven, bread of God, living bread—bread, in a word, which is his flesh: “the bread that I shall give is my flesh.” And lest anyone should say that this flesh he promised was not his own, he says further, not “he who eats my flesh,” but “he who eats me, he too shall live because of me.”

Finally, to leave no doubt, and to convince his hearers absolutely that he could and would leave them his true body, he argues from the miracle of his ascension. You doubt, he tells them, that I can leave you my own body to eat. The promise I have made you scandalizes you. What, then, will it be when you see this same body leave the earth and rise up to heaven? “Does this scandalize you? What, then, if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?”

In truth, gentlemen, all these words, faithfully drawn from the sixth chapter of Saint John, are they not so many vivid lights, so many brilliant flashes, so many thunderbolts against all who resist them? And must one not deliberately blind oneself in order not to see the truth I am preaching? For, once again, to put it in two words: if Jesus Christ had not wished to leave us anything but the sign and the figure of his body, and not its reality, why so many precautions and so many measures to persuade us of a truth so easy to believe? Why this excellent preference of this flesh over manna? Why declare, by more than twenty formal and affirmative statements, that he wills to give his true body? Why employ the miracle of his ascension to support that of the Eucharist? Why leave his hearers in scandal and in the error in which they

found themselves, without giving them the slightest clarification or explanation?

I know it will be answered—for I wish to conceal nothing—that he sufficiently explained himself when he said, in the same chapter: “The flesh profits nothing; it is the spirit that gives life. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” That is the strongest thing our adversaries have to oppose to us, and that which serves them as a shield against all the blows we direct against them. But let us see how I answer it. Pay attention, gentlemen, and you will see how weak their answer is, and how it even confirms the very truth I am preaching to you.

By these words, “the flesh profits nothing,” either he speaks of his own flesh or of another flesh. If he speaks of another flesh, he does not explain himself in the sense our adversaries mean. If he speaks of his own flesh, far from explaining himself, he retracts and utters a blasphemy. He retracts. How? He had assured us that the flesh he promised us was living bread come down from heaven, which gave life to the world, and that whoever ate this bread, which is his flesh, would not die. He had sworn twice that the eating of this flesh, if I may use that term, was so precious that it gave a right to resurrection. After all these praises, he is asked how it is to be eaten: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” He answers: “The flesh profits nothing.” If he means his own flesh, certainly he retracts. It is as if a physician, after praising the wonders of a remedy’s virtue, when asked how it should be taken, answered that the remedy of which he had spoken serves no purpose. He would not be explaining himself; he would be retracting.

I say more. If he speaks of his flesh, he utters a blasphemy. For it is certain that his flesh, hypostatically united to the Word, his flesh vivified by the Spirit, has profited in bringing about our salvation; and it is in this flesh, says Saint Paul, that he destroyed the enmities of heaven with earth, putting to

death the enmities in his flesh. Therefore—and this is what you must carefully note—he does not say, “My flesh profits nothing,” but “The flesh,” that is to say, dead flesh separated from the spirit; and this is the true sense of the words that are set against us. If he explained himself, if he explained himself well, without doubt he made himself understood by those who were listening to him, and after these words they would have understood that he meant to give them only the figure of his flesh to eat. They did not conceive it so, however, gentlemen. Pay attention to this. Despite this supposed explanation, they always remained in their first conviction, that he truly meant to give them his flesh to eat, and it was for this reason that, after these last words of Jesus Christ, as Saint John reports, several of his disciples abandoned him and no longer dared appear in his company: “after this, many of his disciples turned back.” These are the words of the Evangelist—clear proof that he had not explained himself in the sense of our adversaries, meaning only the figure of his body. Otherwise his hearers would no longer have had reason to murmur; their scandal would have been resolved. They would no longer have had reason to leave him as they did. Is this reflection, gentlemen, not convincing? Does it not reduce to dust the objections so often raised?

To be still more convinced, note that the Capernaites had formed two ideas from his words and his promise: one, that he wished to give them truly his flesh to eat and his blood to drink; he does not correct them in this belief—on the contrary, he confirms them in it, as I have proven. The other, that he wished to give them his flesh to eat as dead flesh, cut into pieces, as it is sold in butcher shops; and it is this idea that he corrects, and of which he wishes to undeceive them when he says, “The flesh profits nothing”—that is, raw flesh, cut into pieces, dead flesh separated from the spirit, flesh eaten as it is ordinarily eaten, profits nothing; and it is not in this manner that I wish to give it to you. It will be my flesh truly real and substantial, but my flesh clothed with the qualities proper to glorious bodies—invisible, unalterable,

resembling spirits; my flesh united to the spirit which will give you life and which will give it the power to give life: “It is the spirit that gives life.”

He adds: “These words that I have just spoken to you are spirit and life.” They are spirit and life; for, though the food I promise you is my flesh, it will not appear, however, in this sacrament like other flesh, with a shape, an extension, a color, and the other bodily qualities, but it will be there as spirits are in a place. My words are spirit, because to believe them one must rise above the senses and the imagination, and have recourse to the spirit sustained by faith. They are spirit because if we are not clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ, if we are not armed with faith, humility, charity, and the other virtues of the spirit, when we eat this flesh, it will not profit us; it will instead harm us. Finally, my words are spirit and life, because if you believe them sincerely, and if, animated by this faith, you approach the divine Eucharist with devotion, you will have the life of grace in this world and the life of glory in the other.

There, I say, gentlemen, is the true sense of these words of Jesus Christ which our separated brethren make so much of, which they so often oppose to us, and which they interpret in so distorted a manner. If it were not forbidden me to cite the Fathers, I would tell you that the explanation I have given you is that of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, and of Saint Augustine in his twenty-seventh treatise on Saint John, where he clarifies what appears obscure in what he said about the ninety-eighth psalm. I add that it is the explanation of the first Council of Ephesus, which our separated brethren accept, and I defy them ever to cite me a single Father who has explained these words otherwise. But since I have today confined myself to Scripture, it suffices me; and having invincibly proven, by the sixth chapter of Saint John, that Jesus Christ truly promised us his body to eat and his blood to drink, let us see, in the other Evangelists, that he was no less faithful in fulfilling his promise than he had been generous and magnificent in making it.

We believe it appropriate to cite here these two passages of Saint Augustine. On the question of what it means that the flesh profits nothing, he explains: it does not profit in itself, but only as the hearers understood it, for they understood flesh in the manner in which it is torn apart in a corpse or sold in the meat market, not as it is animated by the spirit. Let the spirit come to the flesh, he says, and it profits greatly; for if the flesh profited nothing, the Word would not have been made flesh, that he might dwell among us (Treatise 27 on John). And in his explanation of the ninety-eighth psalm, it is Jesus Christ himself whom this great doctor makes speak: Understand spiritually what I have said; you are not to eat this body which you see, nor to drink that blood which those who will crucify me are about to shed; I have entrusted to you a certain sacrament, which, understood spiritually, will give you life.

SECOND POINT.

"*This is my body, this is my blood*": these are, gentlemen, the terms of the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's promise, reported by the three other Evangelists—Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, and Saint Luke. Our separated brethren claim that these must be understood in a metaphorical sense, as referring to the figure of his body. We, on the other hand, say that they must be understood in the natural and literal sense, as referring to the reality of his body and his blood. Here is how I prove it.

Jesus Christ, in pronouncing these words, does two things: he makes a law and a testament. First, a law: "Do this in memory of me," he says—that is to say, to forestall any dispute, in memory of my Passion, as Saint Paul explains it. Second, a testament: "This cup is the new testament in my blood."

Now, in a law and a testament, the words must be clear, precise, expressive, without figure, without metaphor, and taken in their natural and literal sense. Therefore these words of the Son of God—"This is my body, this is my blood"—must be understood literally in their natural sense of reality,

and not merely in the figure of his body; otherwise we would no longer have anything certain in our religion. Let us take this up again.

First, as to the testament, everyone agrees that it is, so to speak, the second voice of nature and of reason, by which men declare their last wishes with all the clarity of which they are capable, in order to forestall the lawsuits and quarrels that might arise among heirs over the obscurity or ambiguity of the words. Thus, among all nations, nothing is held more sacred than testaments; no one has the right to alter or change them; all their syllables are venerable, and, according to Saint Augustine, they receive no other glosses than those which they themselves bear. When a testament is opened after the death of the testator, adds this Father, all the heirs remain in silence. One man reads; and though the dead man is without feeling in his tomb, his wishes are nonetheless respected, and his words received without contestation, without figure, without explanation. This being so, may I be permitted to cry out with this great saint: What! The words of a dead man are received with respect on earth, and those of Jesus Christ, living in heaven, will be glossed over, his testament contradicted, his last will disputed! Christ sits enthroned in heaven, and his testament is contradicted on earth! He gives his body and his blood to men in this testament; he says it in clear and formal terms, and it is claimed that he intended nothing but the figure of his body! It is not permitted, with regard to the testaments of other men, to seek other meanings than those which the words themselves give rise to, and yet one grants oneself the liberty to seek, in that of the Son of God, interpretations contrary to his intention and to the natural sense of his words! It is claimed that he left his children only a tangled inheritance, an imaginary good, a chimerical succession, more capable of dividing them than of enriching them: Christ sits enthroned in heaven, and his testament is contradicted on earth!

If a relative or a friend—suffer me to touch up this example—had expressed in his testament, in clear and precise terms, that he was leaving you

his castle situated in such a place, and that, when you wished to take possession of it, you were presented with a castle of canvas which would be the figure of the one you claimed, and you were assured that the testator had had no intention of leaving you anything more, would you not, in truth, be badly deceived? Would you not cry out at once, and with justice, that this testator was a knave, an impostor, a laughingstock, an extravagant man, and that this is not how one speaks in a testament? Yet this, O Savior of men, is how you are made to appear a knave, a deceiver, an impostor, and the gift you have made of your body is treated as extravagant and ridiculous! You have told us in your testament: Take and eat, this is my body, and it is claimed that you have left us nothing but the figure of it!

I have added that Jesus Christ, by these words, established a law and made a commandment: Do this in memory of me—it is necessary, then, that he spoke clearly and precisely; otherwise, if we should come to misunderstand, one of two inconveniences will arise: either we shall fail in respect, if he is truly present in the Eucharist and we believe there is only bread there; or we shall render a worship that is due to his person alone, if there is only a figure there and we believe he is truly present. A commandment of such importance—should it not have been made in terms neither equivocal nor metaphorical? A master who wishes to be obeyed exactly, when he gives his orders to a servant, does he not remove from him every pretext for covering his disobedience? Does he speak to him in figures, in parables? And yet we are to be persuaded that Jesus Christ, in making a commandment of such importance, threatening us even with eternal death if we transgress it, spoke only in figure and metaphor! What, then, gentlemen? Jesus Christ, in the establishment of this law and in the composition of his testament—Jesus Christ, I say, who is virtue and truth itself, who is uncreated wisdom, and in whom are contained all the treasures of his Father's knowledge—was he lacking in foresight like a blind man, or in light like an

ignorant man, or in sincerity like a knave, or in words like an uncultivated man, that he could not clearly explain his thoughts to us on the most important law he ever gave us, on the most august mystery of our religion, on the most essential point of our belief and our salvation? Perhaps it is because the Word did not know how to speak truth, or because Wisdom erred in foolish speech, or because Power, being weak, could not utter what it wished to be understood—these are the words of Saint Hilary.

I conclude, then, that if these words of the testament and the law of Jesus Christ are not to be understood literally, of the reality of his body, but in a metaphorical sense, of the mere figure of his body, we have nothing certain left in our religion. I am then an Arian, a Marcionite, a Nestorian, a Lutheran; I am whatever you please, without anyone being able to accuse me of heresy. For here, gentlemen, is how I reason: lose nothing of my argument, it is decisive; I put it to you in the form of a dilemma.

Either Jesus Christ, for the consolation of his Church, and to bear witness to the excess of his love, was, according to our adversaries, unable to give us really and substantially his body in the Eucharist, or, having been able to, he did not wish to. If our adversaries say he was not able, what then became of that divine power which is the fairest ornament of his divinity—that infinite power which changed water into wine at the wedding of Cana, which multiplied loaves in the desert, which drew all creatures out of nothingness? Is it more difficult to change one substance into another than to create all things out of nothing? Will they then renounce the very first article of their creed, by which they confess an all-powerful God, or set bounds to this omnipotence and measure it by the weakness of human imagination?

If they say he could, but did not wish to, I ask them: if he had indeed wished it, how could he have made it known? Could he have employed, could he even have imagined, signs and terms clearer, more precise, more explicit,

than those he used to persuade us of it? Do we have, in Scripture, testimonies more positive and more explicit to prove the mystery of the Trinity against the Arians, that of the Incarnation against the Marcionites, the Nestorians, the Eutychians, than those we allege to prove the reality of the body of Jesus Christ? These words which prove the divinity of Jesus Christ—My Father and I are one; these others which prove his Incarnation—the Word was made flesh—are they clearer than these: This is my body, this is my blood? And if it is permitted to our adversaries to give a figurative sense to these last, why should the Arians and the Nestorians not have the same privilege with regard to the first? And if those hold themselves still to be Catholic, can they regard the others as heretics? Will it be said that these ancient heretics had no testimony of Scripture in their favor? But I defy all Calvinists to cite me a single text of Scripture that was nearly as favorable to the Nestorians as this one is: I pray, Father, that they may be one, even as we are one—from which they inferred that there was between the Father and the Son only a union of will, and not unity of nature. I defy them, I say, to find in all the Scriptures any words that favor them as openly as these seem to favor the enemies of the Incarnation: he was made in the likeness of men, and found in outward appearance as a man—from which they inferred that he had taken only a phantom body. I defy them, finally, to cite me a single passage that favors in any way the figurative sense they give to these words: This is my body. They say that the verb ‘is’ must here be taken to mean ‘signifies.’ How do they know this? They can know it only from Scripture; and again I defy them to give me the slightest proof of it from the Scriptures.

It is true that in some places the word is taken this way, but that is when the figure is evident, and when the hearers know that a sign is being spoken of, or that other texts of Scripture suggest it. For example, when Jesus Christ said, ‘I am the door,’ he makes us understand at the same time that it is by faith that we pass through him. When he says that he is the vine and that we

are the branches, he adds in the same place that it is by charity that we are united to him. When Saint Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is a rock, he adds immediately after that it is a spiritual rock. When the Son of God says that the word is a seed, the explanation he gives makes us understand that it is a parable and a figure—and so with the others. But in the institution of the sacrament of the altar, where will one find the slightest appearance of figure, the slightest word that suggests it? Would it not be surprising that of the four Evangelists and of Saint Paul, who spoke of this mystery, who reported its words, not one should have thought to use the word 'signifies,' or some similar term, to explain the others and to indicate the figurative sense, if there had been one? On the contrary, the words they report do not exclude all metaphor and all figure: Take and eat, this is my body, which shall be given up for you; take and drink, this is my blood, which shall be shed for you. It has thus been left to us, according to the necessary sense of these words, that very thing which he delivered up and poured out for us. Now I ask: was it the figure of his body that he delivered up for us on the cross? Was it the figure of his blood that he shed? Are we redeemed by a figure, and is the price of our ransom a mere abstraction, a chimera?

Ah! Lord, if after all this our enemies are right, if I am mistaken in the firm belief I hold of your real presence, suffer me to say, after Saint Augustine, that it is you yourself who have deceived me—if it is an error that we believe, we have been deceived by you, O Lord. Yes, gentlemen, I repeat it: if Jesus Christ, in instituting a law that was to bind us under pain of eternal damnation; if, in making a testament on the eve of his death, he did not speak to us plainly; if, in words so express and so precise, he intended us to understand only figures and metaphors—I repeat it, he has deceived us; I no longer recognize anything certain in religion, I no longer find any heretics, and I am entitled to invent as many new articles of faith as I please, by imagining figurative meanings in all the clearest texts of Scripture.

Forgive me, gentlemen, this little outburst. It does not come from any doubt about the sincerity of our God, but on the contrary from the firm assurance in which I stand of the truth of his words.

But time passes. I move on to the testimony of Saint Paul; it is the third proof of the truth that I am advancing, and the subject of my third part: I shall abridge it, so as not to weary you.

THIRD POINT.

The Apostle declares to us first that he learned from Jesus Christ himself what he is about to teach us concerning the Eucharist: “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you”; consequently, he cannot lie, we must believe him. Then, after reporting the words of the institution pronounced by Jesus Christ and contained in the Gospels, he says that whoever eats this heavenly bread unworthily eats his own judgment, and makes himself guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, because he does not rightly discern the body and blood of the Lord.

Now, here is how I reason on this testimony of the Apostle: if there is nothing in the Eucharist but bread, whoever approached it would not sin at all, in not discerning the body of the Lord. On the contrary, he ought rather to conclude that it is not there, and that it is only the figure of it; and if there is only the mere figure of the body of Jesus Christ, then whoever approaches it unworthily does not make himself guilty of the body of the Lord, but only of the figure of his body; and if he is guilty only of this figure, one cannot say that he eats his own judgment and that he makes himself deserving of eternal death. For why speak of so great a crime, and subject men to such terrible punishments, for having failed in respect toward the image or figure of the body of Jesus Christ? Do our separated brethren consider themselves so guilty for having broken and trampled underfoot our holy images, which were no

more than bread—the sign and figure of the body of Jesus Christ? Finally, if Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist only by faith, Saint Paul is a visionary, a fanatic, making us fear an unworthy communion, and threatening eternal death upon those who make themselves guilty of it. For, reasoning according to the principles of our adversaries: whoever approaches this sacrament either has faith or does not have it. If he does not have faith, he receives nothing, he does not communicate at all, since, according to them, Jesus Christ is present there only through faith. Let them then reconcile, if they can, their doctrine with that of Saint Paul. For my part, I break off here, gentlemen, so as not to detain you too long: I believe I have sufficiently proved my proposition.

But before finishing, may I be permitted, my dear brothers, to address a word to you—not in a spirit of bitterness, nor to insult you: God forbid that I should wish to violate the charity that must bind us in Jesus Christ—but to entreat and implore you. The way of remonstrance and prayer was never forbidden.

I entreat you, then, by the body of Jesus Christ your Savior and mine, which was fastened to the cross for us; I entreat you by the blood of that same God which was shed for you and for me: set aside for a moment all the feeble sophistries of human reason; hold fast to the word of God, which you boast of as your sole rule. He has said: My flesh is truly food; he has said: This is my body—not my body in figure, but my body, that same body which shall be given for you, that same blood which shall be shed for you. What doubt, then, can remain to you, after the very author of the gift himself bears witness to the truth? The senses, you say, revolt against these words; reason grows perplexed; difficulties overwhelm us. But, my dear brothers, do not the other mysteries of the religion you believe suffer their own difficulties? Are the mysteries of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the Passion, of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, so easy to believe? Do not the transmission of original sin, the secrets of predestination and of reprobation, have their own obscurities as

well? If there were nothing in our mysteries but what is clear, easy, and proportioned to our senses, why would the Apostle have proclaimed the necessity of taking the human understanding captive under the rule of faith? Ah! let us believe, said Saint Chrysostom, let us believe all that God tells us, however contrary it may seem to our senses and to our imagination. His words cannot deceive us, but our senses often deceive us. Since, then, he has said: This is my body, let us believe it without any doubt, and let us submit to these words all the light of our understanding.

After all, my dear brothers, what do you risk in believing as we do, and what do you not risk in separating yourselves from us on this point? By the very admission of your own ministers, the belief in the real presence has nothing contrary to faith or to salvation. It is thus that Monsieur Daillé explained himself in express terms in his apology, approved by Mestrezat, Aubertin, and Drelincourt, and in his letter to Monsieur de Monglas. Monsieur Drelincourt, in the letter he wrote to his son, a minister at La Rochelle, and clear proof of what I say, did you not yourselves, at the synod of Charenton in 1631, receive at your communion your Lutheran brethren, who nevertheless believe, as we do, in the real presence? But they do not adore it as you do, you will tell me. And that is precisely a contradiction and an absurdity which your own doctors—Beza, the ministers of Thuringia, and Monsieur Daillé—reproach them with. For, says the latter, apart from his apology, if the sacrament of the Eucharist is in substance, not bread as we believe, but the body of Jesus Christ, as the Romans hold, it is evident that it can and must be adored, since the body of Jesus Christ is truly an object worthy of adoration.

Here, then, my dear brothers, is how you ought to reason, as any man of sound sense would reason; here is how I myself would reason, were I of your communion. If I believe that Jesus Christ is truly present at the supper, all Roman Catholics, all my Lutheran brethren, all the most enlightened ministers of my own party agree that I believe nothing that could damn me. On the

contrary, if I believe that Jesus Christ is not truly present at the supper, the whole Roman Church, all the German Protestants whom I have admitted to my communion, say that I am a heretic and in a state of damnation. Would I be foolish enough, then, would I be so much my own enemy, as to risk my salvation rather than take the safer course by denying the reality? Let us make use of this comparison. Two foods are set before you. One is suspect; your friends and your enemies alike assure you that it is poisoned. The other is not suspect, and everyone agrees that it cannot harm you. Would you not have renounced good sense, would you not be your own murderer, if you left the food that is not suspect in order to take the one that is?

Ah! My dear brothers, do then for your eternal salvation what you would do for your temporal safety. I beg you, and I entreat you once more, with Saint Augustine, and I adjure you by the infinite mercies of Jesus Christ, believe as we do, say with your mouths as we do: This is my body. There is, adds this Father, no shorter decision, none clearer or more certain. Remember also who your fathers were, the authors of your schism. Did they not believe what we believe? Did they not come forth from the Roman Church? Did they not receive from her the articles of faith that you retain, the sacraments, and the Scriptures? Why, then, do you abandon them on a point not so clearly stated in the Gospels, which the whole Christian world, except you, acknowledges?

Reflect on this, my dear brothers; return into the bosom of the Church. She holds out her arms to you; she opens her breast to you as a good mother, and your conversion will be her joy and her happiness. But while I call back to the Church her children who have left her, are not you, my brothers, who profess to believe the truths I preach, perhaps yourselves the chief obstacle to the return of our separated brethren? I am ashamed to say it, but should I conceal it? The strongest argument they have to raise against us is the little respect you yourselves seem to show for this august sacrament. Even your Catholics, they tell us, do not believe in the real presence of Jesus Christ, for if

they believed it, would they show it so little respect? Would they commit so many irreverences in your churches, turning them into places of meeting and conversation, and appear there with so little modesty, recollection, and devotion? There, my brothers, is what we will have difficulty answering; there are the very weapons that you yourselves put into the hands of our adversaries, which bind them all the more firmly to their errors. How long will you continue to agree with them in attacking our religion? How long will you disparage our mysteries by your irreverences? Yes, it is because of you, it is on your account, that the holy name of God, and the most august of his mysteries, is blasphemed, as was once reproached to his people: Because of you, my name is blasphemed.

Revive your faith, then; stir it up powerfully upon the greatness of this admirable sacrament; let your lives answer to your belief; and while on one side we labor by the force of our reasons to convince the minds of our separated brethren, labor on the other to touch their hearts by the good odor of your virtues, so that, being all united here below by one same faith, we may be united in heaven in the enjoyment of one same glory. Amen.

SERMON ON THE PRIESTHOOD,

Preached at the First Solemn Mass of a Young Priest.

"You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands."

(Psalm 8)

Powerful in works and in words, raising the dead, restoring health to the sick, straightening the lame, healing the paralyzed, casting out demons, consoling the afflicted, instructing the ignorant, teaching the peoples, converting sinners, forgiving sins, confounding idolatry, showing all men the way of salvation, immolating in sacrifice the body and blood of a God—such, my brothers, was the occupation of Jesus Christ on earth, and these are the illustrious prerogatives that made David say, by a spirit of prophecy, that God his Father had crowned him with honor and glory, and had set him over the works of his hands.

But if Jesus Christ possessed all these advantages by right and by preeminence, priests possess them by privilege and by participation. Jesus Christ has established them as his ministers, has entrusted them with his authority, has delegated them as his Father delegated him: As the Father sent me, I also send you.

It is, then, rightly, as a minister of the Lord, that I address to you today the words of my text, and that I say to you with David that the Lord has crowned you with glory and honor, and has set you over the works of his hands, since you share in the principal qualities that merited this praise for Jesus Christ.

That I may not confound anything in a subject so vast and so majestic as has been entrusted to my feeble voice, I must observe some order in the little I

have to say to you. Nothing is greater, nothing more elevated in the world than the priesthood; consequently nothing deserves more our respect than those who are invested with it: You have crowned him with glory and honor. Nothing is more advantageous to the world than the priesthood; consequently nothing is more worthy of our love than those who fulfill its functions: and you have set him over the works of your hands. We must, then, honor priests because of the excellence of their character, and love them because of the good things they procure for us through their ministry.

Holy Spirit, you who, in the consecration of this new athlete, have poured out and today pour out again an abundance of blessings upon him in the celebration of his first Mass, to render him a worthy minister of your power and of your mercies, descend into my heart and upon my tongue to make me the worthy panegyrist of the honor and glory with which you deign to crown him. Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT.

Whether God dispenses punishments or distributes rewards, whatever he does, his ways are always just and his judgments equitable, for he is justice and truth itself. Those he punishes deserve punishment; those he raises up deserve to be honored; and the higher he raises them, the more they deserve honor. Now, in heaven and on earth there is nothing more elevated than priests, nothing therefore more worthy of our respect.

You will be convinced of this, my brothers, if you reflect with me on the double power he has communicated to them—one over his real body, which theologians call the power of order; the other over his mystical body, the faithful, a power which, in the same theological language, is called the power of the keys, or of jurisdiction. These are the two foundations of the elevation

and dignity of priests, and of the respect you owe them. Let us set them in their proper light.

In the sacrifices of the old law, notes Saint Augustine, the priest immolated only a victim foreign to himself; but in the sacrifice of the new law, it is the same God who offers and who is offered—who offers as priest, and who is offered as victim. From this it follows that the Savior of the world, in sacrificing, exercises over his own adorable person an authority proper to himself, since one cannot sacrifice a victim without having a right over its blood and its life. And from this same fact follows another consequence: that having substituted priests in his place to continue the same sacrifice that was offered on the cross, he has transferred to them the same right over his sacred humanity, has ordained that they use this wholly divine right, and has established them to exercise it: Do this in memory of me. Thus, my brothers, although the priest in this sacrifice is only the substitute of Jesus Christ, it is nonetheless certain that Jesus Christ submits to him, subjects himself to him, and renders to him every day, upon our altars, the most prompt and the most exact obedience.

If faith did not teach us these truths, would they not pass in our minds for fictions, and could we even imagine, on the part of a God, so prodigious an abasement? Could we think that a man could ever attain such an elevation, and be clothed with a character that puts him in a position, if I may say so, to command his own sovereign Lord, and to make him descend from heaven? We read with nothing but astonishment what is reported in the Gospel, that Jesus was obedient to Mary. There is less occasion, however, to be astonished at this, since he was the son of Mary, and nature seemed to give this mother power over her son. But what is the priest, and what title has he in regard to his God, that is not a title of dependence and of servitude? Yet at the word of this servant, of this slave, the Divine Majesty comes every day to humble itself in the sanctuary and to shut up there all its glory. What an astonishing

marvel, cries Saint Ephrem, what an ineffable power! No, it is no longer a Joshua who stops the sun in its course, no longer a Moses who brings down manna from heaven, no longer an Elijah who calls down fire from its center. Conceive something greater than all this. It is a man who, despite his mortal condition, raised above all other men, and even above the angels, has an intimate communion with the eternal Father, participates in his power, and is destined in a sense to the same function as he. The eternal Father, from all eternity, engenders his Son by the sole word of his understanding; the priest produces this same Son every day upon our altars by the words of his mouth. His hands, holier than those of the cherubim who supported the mercy-seat, more venerable than the throne of sapphire on which the Ancient of Days appeared seated, more worthy than the magnificent bed of Solomon, as fortunate as the bosom of Mary, engender, touch, bear the same God. It is here, O my God, that you seem to exhaust all the treasures of your power and of your mercies in favor of a reasonable creature, since you are willing to place in its hands your honor and your very person. There, my dear brother, lies your sacred and formidable ministry.

By an inconceivable privilege, says the great Augustine, you become today the astonishment of heaven, the admiration of the earth, the wonder of man, the horror of hell, the terror of demons, the object of the veneration of angels. And you, fortunate mother, in the consecration of four sons here present, you are the object of the favor of your God and of the holy jealousy of so many other mothers to whom he has not granted the same grace. Thus, I am persuaded, you cry out within yourself with the royal prophet: What shall I render to the Lord? What shall I render to you, Lord, for so many benefits? I will take the cup of salvation; I will unite myself in spirit with my children when they offer you this sacrifice of praise, and when they present you the cup of thanksgiving, I will invoke with them your holy name.

But from all this, what conclusion? That nothing is more sublime than the dignity of priests, nothing more respectable than their character. I complete your conviction by recalling to you the power they still possess over the mystical body of Jesus Christ—I mean, over the faithful.

It is no idle word that Jesus Christ spoke to his apostles when he told them: All that you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and all that you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. The Fathers and the interpreters recognize that by this the Son of God subjected the whole Church to the priests in the persons of the apostles, that he invested them with a power that extends over all the members of the mystical body of this Savior, and that there is in the world neither prince nor monarch who does not fall under this jurisdiction, as sovereign as it is universal.

Would you, my brothers, form some slight idea of this? Imagine a man who, from a mediocre fortune and an obscure condition, finds himself suddenly raised to the highest ministry of a great state, and this by the pure liberality of the master who wishes to display his power in the elevation of his subject. Behold the arbiter of all things, and the most important affairs are conducted only through him. It is he who distributes favors, who assigns rewards, who makes men happy or unhappy. His orders are received as those of the highest authority, and all the interests of the prince are entrusted to him. Should a rebel, should a criminal have his pardon to obtain, it is to this mediator that he addresses himself, and, by the efficacy of this mediation, the most guilty is in a moment restored to all his rights and all his hopes. Such, and greater still, is the power that God communicates to his priests over his mystical body. They are gods on earth, who seem to form a species apart in his religion. Their condition is, as it were, singular between God and men. With God, they are men; with men, they are gods. Who can remit sins, if not God alone, said the Scribes and the Pharisees? Now, the priest remits them; he binds and looses; not only does he declare the penitent absolved, but he

absolves him himself. One may say to him, as to Jesus Christ: If you will, you can heal me; and he may answer as Jesus Christ did: I will, be healed; and at his voice, leprosy disappears at once. All human authority goes only so far as to declare innocent one who was falsely accused; but the power of a priest goes so far as to render innocent one who was truly guilty. The destruction of sin is the proper work of a God made man; it cost him all his blood. A priest accomplishes it every day with ease. He raises his hand, and says: I absolve you; and at the sound of this word, all the walls of Jericho fall down. What a marvel! cries out on this Saint Chrysostom; the servant is established judge on earth, and the master, in heaven, ratifies the sentences he pronounces. Heaven receives from earth the rule and form of justice that it must follow.

There, my dear brothers, is the ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted to you. You are his delegates, and, if I may use the term, his plenipotentiaries, to conclude that great peace which is negotiated between heaven and earth, between an offended God and sinful man. It is to you that the Creator of the world entrusts his cause and his interests; it is to you that he says, even more than to his prophets: Judge between me and my vineyard. This man is a sinner; he has outraged me, he has wounded my glory. I could judge him myself, but I refer myself to you. Whatever an enemy he may be, I shall hold him as a friend the moment you have declared him such. The instant you have pardoned him, I pardon him, and all the gates of heaven, which were closed against him, shall open to receive him. Behold, I say, ministers of the Lord, how God speaks; such is the power he communicates to you, and by virtue of that power, one may say that all that is holiest and most sacred is at your disposal.

Let it cease, then, monarchs of the world, let it cease to exalt your greatness. It fades away if I compare it to that of priests. Your power appears only in a small part of the earth; that of priests shines throughout the whole earth, in heaven, and even to the gates of hell. Your treasures are made of the

metals of the earth; those of priests, of the grace of Jesus Christ. You give, you take away the liberty of bodies; priests take and give that of the soul. You close and open, as pleases you, the prisons of the earth; priests open and close, at their pleasure, those of hell.

After this, shall we be surprised that the greatest princes of the world have shown so much respect for priests; that a Constantine, clothed in the imperial purple, dared not seat himself before the Fathers of a council; that an empress made it her honor, her merit, to serve at table a bishop, and that at all times the respect of princes toward priests has been the most illustrious mark of religion? No, my brothers, all this contains nothing that I do not easily understand, since faith revealed to them, in priests, a power far above their own greatness.

But what astonishes and grieves me is the contempt shown today toward these sacred ministers of the Lord.

Alas! let us say it to the shame of Christianity—the stones of the sanctuary are mingled with those of the temple of idols; the priest is confounded with the people; he has become their laughingstock and their reproach, according to the expression of the prophet. For what does one see? What do you see? Priests often placed among the servants and the lackeys, especially among those newly ennobled families sprung from common stock, whose origin one can still touch with the fingertip. Does a priest find himself in a worldly gathering? If he does not distinguish himself by his wit, his cheerfulness, his birth, and his superior positions, no deference is shown him; the lowest rank will always be his; his very character is what is least respected. Is there a company where, ordinarily, some ecclesiastic does not serve as entertainment? People turn his most pious actions into ridicule, criticize all his conduct, examine with blind scrutiny his slightest faults, and seize with a joy full of avidity anything that can give occasion for unjust

censure. Never, in a word, is conversation so pleasant, never is slander so well received, as when it falls upon the anointed of the Lord.

Even, says Saint Jerome, if it were idolaters or Jews who committed these outrages against us, we would at least have the consolation of displeasing those whom Jesus Christ himself did not please, of being hated and despised by those who mistreated and put our master to death. But that Christians should make sport of what is holiest in religion; that those for whom we sacrifice ourselves daily should outrage us with such indignity; that they should speak ill of those from whom they have not even the right to receive blessings; that a professed libertine, a thoughtless youth, should insult the ministers of the Lord—great God! You see these abominations, and you suffer them! You who once exercised so terrible a chastisement upon those who mocked your prophet; you who opened the earth beneath the feet of those Israelites who had spoken ill of Moses; you who cursed Ham with all his posterity for having uncovered the nakedness of his father—you see, I say, Lord, these abominations, and you suffer them! Is your justice, then, asleep? Is your arm shortened? Have you not sworn, by the mouths of your prophets, that those who failed in respect toward your ministers would fall prey to foreign nations; that their cities would be sacked, their harvests destroyed; that they would be overwhelmed with misery and disease, and would become the most unfortunate of nations? Strike, then, Lord; strike, exterminate these impious ones; sustain the glory of your altars and of your ministers. Alas! my brothers, perhaps to your misfortune and to mine, sooner or later he will avenge himself, and, if he is slow to strike, we must fear it will be only to strike in the fullness of his fury.

In vain shall we say, by way of excuse, that it is the priests themselves who draw upon themselves this contempt by their irregular conduct. Long ago the Savior of the world answered this famous pretext when he said: The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses; do not do as they do, but

observe what they tell you. Whether a priest does or does not do what he teaches concerns him alone, but it is no excuse for you. Despite the irregularity of his conduct, his character is indelible; and it is this character that renders him respectable above men and angels. ‘I respect,’ you say, ‘his character.’ You say so, my brothers, I know it, it is the ordinary manner of speaking of priests. Such a one, one says, saving the respect I owe to his character, is intemperate, and so forth. With this precaution, one believes oneself entitled to say anything; one pretends thereby to sanctify one’s slander. You deceive yourselves, my brothers; you separate too much the character from the minister, and once again, it is the vain pretext of your irreligion. God does not command you only to honor the priesthood in general; he wills that you honor those to whom it is attached. Yes, it is for this particular priest, however vicious he may be, that he wills you to have respect, since you cannot despise him without despising his character, which is inseparable from his person. I say more: you render, in a sense, more honor to God and to the Church by not despising a priest who makes himself despicable, than by respecting one whom his virtues render respectable. When you honor a virtuous priest, it is for his own merit; but when you honor a vicious priest, it is for his character. To honor a priest whose doctrine is orthodox and whose morals are irreproachable—who would not do so? One acts there from a principle of reason, and no express commandment of God is needed for that. But to honor a priest in whom one finds vices contrary to his state, that is to be a Christian; that is to act from a principle of religion, and it is principally on this that falls the commandment God gives us to honor priests.

Revive here, then, your faith, my brothers; let it make you recognize and respect, everywhere, in the person of priests, Jesus Christ, whose ministers by excellence they are. These are the dispositions that the fullness of honor and glory God has attached to their persons demands of you. Add to this a singular love for the advantages you receive from them.

SECOND POINT.

Of all the attributes of God, there is none that engages our hearts more strongly, none that more justly merits our love, than his goodness and his mercy. Nor is there any he has manifested more outwardly, or of which he has given us more striking proofs. Now, it is chiefly upon these two lovable perfections that he has established priests as his ministers. If, then, we must love God because he is good and merciful, can we dispense ourselves from loving priests, who are the ministers of his goodness and his mercy toward us? They are so principally through the exercise of their ministry and through the efficacy of their prayers. Let us pause on these two duties of priests.

In the creation of the world, God willed no other ministry than that of his omnipotence to form man. He willed to be the sole author of his work, and no other hand than his own touched it. But in the redemption he availed himself of various offices. He associated to himself chosen persons and established them as cooperators in the salvation of man. Those whom he destined to this employment are the priests; and to render them more lovable to the world, he had it written by his apostle, as at the head of all the functions of his Church: We are God's fellow workers. A priest is, then, the co-worker of God in the works of his mercy through the exercise of his ministry—I mean, through the administration of the sacraments, through the preaching of the divine word, and through all the holy works that tend to the edification of one's neighbor. Now, in this capacity, how many advantages does he not procure for the world? If he receives the deposit of consciences, the secret of hearts, what tempests does he not calm? What temperaments does he not bring to the conversion of sinners? By means of a single word said with unction, what disorders are checked, what souls deplore their past wanderings and sigh after a happy deliverance! What tears, what holy desires succeed criminal desires! Follow, if you can, the course of blessings attached to the ministry of a priest.

If one considers him preaching the divine word, what marvelous effects does he not produce? How many consciences are shaken! How many impious ones confounded! How many just souls consoled! What fruit has Saint Bernard, Saint Dominic, Saint Vincent Ferrer, Saint Francis Xavier not produced? Everything was warmed, set ablaze, touched, converted, carried away by the spirit of God speaking in them. We have, it is true, but one master among us, said Saint Augustine, and it is Jesus Christ, who is the truth and the God of truth. But, as he is no longer among us as he was among the Jews, instructing and teaching them himself, he substitutes in his place the priests, into whom he pours his spirit and his light. If, then, God is the truth, priests are the word that makes it known to us. If God is the truth that leads to eternal happiness, it is priests who show the way to it. If God is the truth that delivers from error and falsehood, it is priests who discover that error and that falsehood. If God is the truth that sanctifies, it is priests who apply this sanctification. Finally, if God is the God of truth, of consolation, of grace, and of blessing, it is through the medium of priests, as through sacred channels, that all these blessings descend to us. Can you refuse your love to benefactors so distinguished? You will find yourselves still more bound to it if I show you the fruits of the prayers of a good priest. A priest, says Saint Gregory Nazianzen, is an all-powerful mediator, who has the right to approach God to set before him the wishes and the necessities of the peoples, and who effectively implores his mercy. Like Aaron, who, censer in hand, stood between the living and the dead to appease the wrath of the Lord; like Moses, who, with hands raised, held back the avenging arm of God; like those angels of whom Scripture speaks, who ascended and descended without ceasing by a mysterious ladder—priests descend to hear the wishes of the peoples; they ascend to carry them up to the ears of God through prayer. Now, what fruit, what success are such prayers not capable of producing? For the prayers of a priest are not like those of a private individual who prays in his own name,

and who, being but dust and ashes, must count for much the liberty allowed him of addressing himself directly to God. A priest prays in the name of the Church and of all the faithful, whose minister and, as it were, ambassador he is. His prayers are the vows brought forth by the charity of all the peoples united together. Now, again I say, can God refuse anything to such prayers? One is surprised to see striking conversions, happy successes in desperate affairs; one wonders where this can come from. The world, which judges according to the flesh, does not fail to find human explanations. But if one traced it back to its source, one would most often find it in the prayer of a good priest. The faithful Ananias prays for Saul, and Saul is thrown down on the road to Damascus. This zealous minister sends up ardent vows toward heaven, and his prayers complete what those of Stephen had begun. No, my brothers, there is nothing that the prayers of a good priest do not obtain; to such a point that God is obliged to command Moses to pray no more, because his prayer was holding back the just vengeance he wished to take upon his people. It is true, then, that priests are established over the works of the Lord's mercy; that they procure considerable goods for the faithful, and that they are no less worthy of our love than of our respect. What a vast field still opens here to my zeal, and what could I not say against the indifference, and even the aversion, that is shown today toward priests? But my duty recalls me to him who is the subject of this solemnity.

I return, then, to you, my dear brother; and in telling you that the Lord has crowned you with honor and glory, and that he has established you as the minister of his mercies, allow me to tell you also that he has imposed upon you a strict obligation and an indispensable duty: that of being holy, and of sanctifying others. It is a truth in the order of the wisdom and providence of God, that all dignities are ministries. They honor, but they burden. It is just, says Saint Bernard, that those who are raised to them should find in their obligations the counterweight that lowers them, and that the respect shown

them should be tempered by the labor imposed upon them. It is likewise true that duties are proportioned to honors, and that the priesthood of Jesus Christ, being the summit of the honor and glory of the Church, obliges also to greater care and to a more eminent holiness. The priests of the Old Testament had to be holy to offer incense and common bread; they had to be holy to touch the ark of the God of Israel; they had to be holy to carry the vessels of the Lord: Be clean, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. It is no longer incense and common bread that you offer; it is the heavenly bread, the bread of life, the only Son of the eternal Father. These are no longer fragile vessels, nor a material ark, that you carry; it is the very Lord of the ark, the very God of Israel. You carry him every day in your hands, you carry him upon your tongue, you carry him in your stomach and upon your heart. Ah! what horror it would be to carry him in profane hands, upon an indiscreet tongue, in a corrupted stomach and heart! Be clean, you who carry the vessels of the Lord.

But I lose myself, my dear brother, in wishing to instruct you. In the secrecy of your solitude, apart from the commerce of men, you have doubtless learned from God himself, through frequent reflection, the strict obligation of holiness that so formidable a ministry imposes upon you. The Christian education you drank in with your mother's milk, the examples of virtue that have sustained you both within and without, the wise and regular conduct with which you have edified us until now—all this promises us that, aided by grace, you will so worthily fulfill the duties of your vocation that you will draw down upon yourself, upon your family, and upon this parish, an abundance of blessings, which I wish for you as much as for this whole assembly. Amen.

SERMON ON THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

"The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

(John 4)

Every religion, my brothers, must have its sacrifice—I mean, a supreme act of its priesthood, by which it immolates a victim capable of honoring the sovereign majesty of God and of satisfying his offended justice. The sacrifice of the old law consisted in the blood of animals slaughtered upon the altars, in libations, and in outward ceremonies—a feeble image of what was to be accomplished in the course of time. Jesus Christ, the instituter and author of the new law, in expiring on the cross, offered indeed to his Father a sacrifice infinitely more glorious, by which he adored him in spirit and in truth. But that bloody sacrifice is past. It was made for us, but it was neither performed nor celebrated by us; we were neither its ministers nor its witnesses. Now, in a true religion, there must be a true sacrifice that endures as long as the religion itself. It is we, then, who must truly adore God, we who must immolate the true victim. But where shall we find a victim worthy of God, if not in the person of the Savior? There is none but he alone, without doubt; and since he is the true victim, what means is there to immolate him every day, and yet leave him eternally alive? He himself, my brothers, found this admirable secret in the institution he made of the sacrifice of the Mass. There he is, as on the cross, priest and victim together, immolated to the glory and to the justice of his Father; and it is by this ineffable sacrifice that we adore God in spirit and in truth, as his Son himself adored him.

I say, then, and here is my design: the sacrifice of the Mass, like that of Calvary, is a sacrifice of religion for the glory of God—first point; it is also a sacrifice of propitiation for our sins—second point. Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT.

You know, my brothers, that the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished only to repair the honor of God. God had been debased below the creature by sin. To repair his honor, it was necessary that he be raised up to infinity, and the whole undertaking consisted in bringing it about that the Word, through the Incarnation, should become less than his Father, that he should become his slave, that he should be humbled and abased beneath his own greatness, and that he could say with truth: My Father is greater than I. Indeed, this was the work of the Savior in this world: it was his religion and his life to depend upon God his Father in his actions, in his undertakings, in his designs, and to bear all the marks of inequality and dependence. He bore them all without dispensing himself from a single one. He was his servant, his disciple, his envoy, and his prophet; and all the different humiliations, obediences, and servitudes to which this Savior submitted every day were so many proofs of this saying, My Father is greater than I—so many, as it were, different ceremonies of his religion, different ways of declaring that God the Father was more perfect, greater, than the Man-God.

But the most excellent act of this religion of the Savior, his supreme adoration, his great abasement beneath the power and majesty of God, the action by which he raised God more eminently above himself, and which was finally his sacrifice, was that which took place on Calvary, where he humbled himself, not merely to the point of becoming the slave of his Father, but as the victim sacrificed to his honor, destroyed, consumed, and pushed to the last degree of annihilation: It is finished, he said, breathing his last. At last, the greatest of sacrifices is accomplished. I declare by my death, not merely that God is above creatures, but that he is infinitely above the Man-God, and that it is just that a God should be crucified and die to satisfy him: It is finished.

Behold the last consummation of all the honors and of all the satisfactions that an offended God could receive.

Adorable sacrifice, my brothers, which is renewed every day in the Mass that we celebrate and that you hear so often! Listen to me. Jesus Christ, upon our altars, is truly immolated just as he was on Calvary, and consequently, Jesus Christ immolated upon our altars honors God as much as he honored him in expiring upon the cross. Let us take this up again, my brothers, and follow me.

Jesus Christ immolated on our altars is truly and as really immolated as he was on Calvary. To understand this great truth of our religion, note, if you please, that we consummate our mysteries by consecrating the blood of Our Lord by a consecration distinct and separate from that of the body, and that, by virtue of the sacramental words, as the theologians say, the body of Jesus Christ is placed only under the species of bread, and his blood only under the accidents of wine, in such a way that these parts would really be separated, were it not that by a natural connection they find themselves everywhere inseparably united. Now, by this consecration and this mysterious distinction, we do three things worthy of your attention.

The first is that we celebrate the memory of the death of Jesus Christ, which was caused not by a mortal wound, but by the separation of his blood from his body stretched upon the cross. This representation of the blood, separated and poured forth from the veins of the Savior, recalls to mind and sets again before the eyes of the eternal Father the death of his Son, which is, as I have said, the consummation of all honors and of all sacrifices; so that, in holding the chalice, we glorify this adorable Father and attain even to that point of adoration to which the Man-God, that great priest, attained.

The second thing is that we not only renew the memory of the death of Our Lord, but that we also truly offer that very one who died and who still

bears in the wounds of his hands and his feet the living marks of his sorrowful death. It is the same victim, says the Council of Trent, the same priest, the same sacrifice as that of the cross, differing only in the manner of offering it.

The third thing, which is truly ineffable, is that we offer this adorable Son not only in the state in which he is most pleasing to the justice of God, but also—which did not occur on Calvary—in the state in which he is most pleasing to his love. When this Son is between our hands and we raise him toward heaven, God the Father sees in his person all the marks of his obedience sacrificed, and at the same time he sees in him all the felicities of life, all the beauties of glory, and all the honors of victory and of triumph. Understand this, my brothers. The Savior, between our hands, is a victim just as much as he was on the cross, and he is living and impassible as much as he is in the bosom of his Father amid the splendors of heaven. He is immolated more truly than ever were the bulls and the rams, consumed and reduced to ashes, and yet he remains whole and invulnerable, more so than the angels. He has death in his heart, since there is an intimate and profound wound there, which is the most beautiful spectacle that could be shown to a just and offended God; but at the same time he has life in that same heart, and this victorious and immortal life holds death there in chains. And this is what we show to God the Father, and what we present to him when we raise the holy host. After this, where can our thoughts, our desires, our ambitions aspire? And what can the wisdom of the Almighty devise that is higher and more divine to render our religion glorious?

Indeed, in presenting this victim to God, we have grounds to glory before him, and to boast, in the raptures of our devotion, that we are as grateful toward him as he has been generous and merciful toward us: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Great God, we may say to him, you have loved me to the point of giving me your Son, and I love you to the point of giving you that same Son. You were not content to create for me heaven and

earth; I am not content to present to you heaven and earth, the whole world and a thousand worlds. I go on to infinity; and the same act of love that you exercised toward me on Calvary, in giving me your only Son, I exercise it toward you in offering you that same Son. You gave him to me as the price of my ransom; I return him to you as the crown of your greatness. You gave him to me covered with blood and wounds, as an example of patience and holiness; I return him to you surrounded with glory, as an object of your delight: Behold, O God. Look upon him, love him, possess him; receive from my hand what is your perfection, your happiness, and your life.

It seems that David contemplated this truth in spirit when he wrote his one hundred fifteenth psalm. He seeks what he might do to render worthy thanks to the Creator for his graces and his benefits: What shall I render to the Lord for all that he has given me? He found it in earlier times, and contented himself with inviting all the stars of heaven and all the nations of the earth to help him in his design of discharging his debt to God, and to form for him praises worthy of the favors he had received from his goodness. But when he comes to know the mystery of the Incarnation, and learns by the revelations of the Holy Spirit that God has given him his own Son, he renounces this recourse to creatures, and sees clearly that the praises, the offerings, and the sacrifices of all the peoples of the world are not capable of satisfying his debt. Be silent, he says, princes and kings, angels and men; you have but words, and the good that God has done me is infinite. What, then, shall I do? Must I die a debtor of this incomparable debt? No, no, he adds at once, I see upon the altars of the true religion a chalice filled with a precious wine, and behold precisely what I need to acquit myself: I will take the cup of salvation. I will steep my tongue in this chalice, I will pour this blood upon my lips, I will receive it into my heart, and in this heart filled with God I will form praises and acts of thanksgiving that will equal the benefit of the Creator, and that will

match all that has been done for me on Calvary: I will take the cup of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.

In truth, my brothers, must it not be, at the very least, a keen displeasure to our separated brethren, not to be able to speak so excellently of our mysteries? In rejecting the use of this divine sacrifice, they have rejected the honor we possess of adoring our God so perfectly, without the least effusion of blood.

Thus, my brothers, in this miraculous Eucharist, Our Lord is a victim sufficiently immolated for our religion to have the most perfect holocaust, and to be in the world the most religious and the holiest of all religions that can be or ever have been; and at the same time it has a life glorious enough to glorify the angels in heaven and to be the most perfect and the first felicity of the blessed. At the same hour, it is on the one hand the thanksgiving and the offering that the Church militant makes to God the Father, and on the other hand it is the reward that God gives to the Church triumphant, sufficing for these two great acts of justice owed by the creature and by the Creator—giving to men here below wherewith to thank and worthily adore a God, and to God wherewith to reward worthily and infinitely the men who are in paradise. What a miracle, what a prodigy, what an invention of the wisdom, the power, and the mercy of a God!

Now, my brothers, it is at this august sacrifice that you have the honor of assisting every time you hear Mass. It is in your presence that this great mystery of adoration and of supreme worship is performed. It is for you and with you that Jesus Christ, priest according to the order of Melchizedek, offers himself, in order to give you thereby the true means of perfectly adoring the sovereign Majesty. For although Jesus Christ is there at once the principal sacrificer and the victim, and although it is in his own person that the priest says: This is my body, this is my blood, he is not, however, the only one who

sacrifices. He deigns to associate you with this august mystery. The whole Church, says Saint Augustine, also offers this sacrifice, and with her the faithful who are her members. The priest, who consecrates as principal minister, speaks in your name and on your behalf; he is your agent and your ambassador. What glory it is to be united in this way with Jesus Christ in this incomparable sacrifice! What are you, my adorations and my tears; what are you, my prayers and my homage, when I regard you alone? You are not, and cannot be, by yourselves anything but a defective oblation, the imperfect holocaust of a nature infinitely indebted to the divine justice, and incapable of satisfying it by its own efforts. But when these adorations and these tears, when these homages and these prayers are united to the divine and human actions of Jesus Christ, who adores his Father for me and associates me with this sacrifice of praise, of what are they not capable, and what obligations do they not discharge for me toward the sovereign majesty? I bless him as much as he can be blessed, because it is a God who blesses him for me. I acknowledge the sovereign dominion of the Lord and my humble dependence, as far as I am able to acknowledge them, because it is his Son, his equal in all things, who for me takes the form of a slave and obscures all the splendor of his glory.

Learn, then, from this, Christian hearers, not only the advantage of hearing Mass often, but the strict obligation of bringing to it all the attention and recollection of your spirit, all the devotion and purity of your heart. For if it is true that Jesus Christ associates you with this sublime sacrifice of praise, if it is true that you have the honor of entering into communion with him and with the whole Church, what honor would you be showing him—or rather, what outrage would you not be committing against him—by coming to it with a dissipated spirit, an imagination filled with the follies of the age, a mind full of your own affairs! But let us break off this line of moral reflection; it can be resumed elsewhere. Time passes, and there remains for me only to show you

that Jesus Christ, upon our altars, is, as on the cross, not only a victim of religion for the glory of his Father, but also a victim of propitiation for our sins.

SECOND POINT.

As soon as our first father had tasted that fruit so fatal to his innocence, the sentence was pronounced against him, and all his posterity was enveloped in his misfortune. We were all children of wrath, victims destined for eternal death, and all the sacrifices of the old law were not capable of delivering us from it. They were, says the Apostle, but weak and powerless elements, insufficient to appease the wrath of God and to pay our debts. A victim of infinite worth was needed. A God himself had to become our surety and our ransom. He did so, my brothers, and the sacrifice of the cross is not only a sacrifice of praise for the honor of the Divinity, but also a sacrifice of redemption for the salvation of men.

Now, it is said and proven that the sacrifice of our altars is the same as that of the cross. It is therefore also, like this one, not only a sacrifice of religion by which we honor God as much as he deserves, but also a sacrifice of propitiation which appeases his anger, satisfies his justice, and reconciles us with him. The Council of Trent has so decided, and hurls its anathemas against those who dispute with us this consoling truth: If anyone says that the sacrifice of the Mass is not propitiatory, let him be anathema. But how does this come about, and what must we do to participate in it fruitfully? Two things remain for me to explain to you, if you will keep your attention for me. It must first be granted that there is some difference between this sacrifice of propitiation consummated on the cross and continued upon our altars, as to the manner of producing its effect. The sacrifice of the cross merits everything

and applies nothing; the sacrifice of the altar, on the contrary, applies everything and merits nothing. Let me explain.

It is with the order of grace as with the order of nature. In the order of nature, although universal causes are fruitful and necessary sources without which nothing would be done, they would nonetheless remain sterile if particular causes did not apply their general influences to produce their particular effects. Likewise, in the order of grace, the sacrifice of the cross is the universal cause of the redemption and salvation of men. It has paid all our debts; it has satisfied, in strict justice, the divine justice for our sins: By one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified. But this universal cause of our salvation, this all-powerful sacrifice, does not produce its effect, does not save sinners, if its merits are not applied to them. Now it is the sacraments, it is the sacrifice of the Mass, that applies these merits as a secondary cause divinely established to produce grace and the remission of sins in each of the faithful in particular. It is by the power of this sacrifice, says the Council of Trent in that same session, that we find mercy before God, that we find the aid of grace in time of need, and that sins, even the most enormous, are forgiven.

What, then! Is the sacrifice of the Mass also a sacrament for those who merely assist at it? No, my brothers, and it is not by immediately producing sanctifying grace that it remits sins, as the sacraments do. It is in this sense that God, moved and appeased by this adorable sacrifice and by this innocent victim immolated for us to his justice, grants to sinners his actual graces, the spirit of compunction, and the gift of penitence, by which they finally obtain the remission of their sins; it is always the Council that speaks: By this oblation the Lord grants grace and the gift of penitence. Indeed, if the Son of God, crucified on Calvary, applied, by the power of his prayer, the first fruits of the merit of his blood to his executioners and to several Jews and Gentiles who found themselves present at that great spectacle, and whom he converted,

can one doubt that he is equally favorable to those who assist at the unbloody sacrifice of our altars, since, as I have said, it is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, the same victim, the same priest, the same heart, the same love? Here as on the cross, he offers himself to the justice of his Father for our sins. Priest and victim together, he presents to him his wounds and his adorable blood to appease his wrath, and at the same time, says the Apostle, ever living though immolated, he never ceases to plead our cause before this same Father and to engage him, by his continual prayer, to apply to us his infinite merits: ever living to make intercession for us.

Ah! my brothers, if God had attached the remission of sins to the bloody sacrifices of animals, and had established for that but a single temple in the universe, as he did under the Old Testament, you might perhaps invoke your poverty and your weakness to excuse yourselves from taking part in it. But he wills here neither the blood of beasts, nor your own, although he would have the right to require it. He is content with a sacrifice of which he himself bears all the cost, and which he offers in every place and at every time: In every place a sacrifice is offered, and to my name a pure oblation. What reason, then, can dispense you from assisting at it diligently?

I do it, you say. Very well. But how do you do it? Here, my brothers, is where I have occasion to cry out over the dispositions one brings to these adorable mysteries. It is, it is true, a sacrifice of expiation for our sins; but will it expiate them, if you assist at it only to commit new ones?

Three kinds of persons were present at the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. The Jews mocked him and insulted him. The Gentiles regarded him with indifference or with cold compassion. His holy Mother and some pious women were deeply afflicted and wept bitterly. Behold what happens every day in the celebration of our holy mysteries.

How many attend as the Jews did, to mock Jesus Christ, appearing there only with an impudent or lascivious air, occupied with civilities, with flatteries, with greetings to women adorned like idols, with comic and ridiculous manners, as if they were in a ballroom or at a theater! How many attend with an ulcerated conscience, a fickle imagination, a corrupted heart, thus multiplying their sins, while the priest makes a public confession to God and asks his pardon! How many, while the body of Jesus Christ is being elevated for adoration, bend a knee to the ground out of false respect, and say to him, like the insolent soldiers, Hail, Rabbi—how many, with a sacrilegious effrontery, jest, amuse themselves, turn their backs to the altar, interrupt by their scandalous talk the piety and recollection of good people, and, instead of occupying themselves with these great mysteries celebrated in their presence, converse about news, stories, intrigues, which even moderately strict persons would not wish spoken of in their own houses! I shudder, my brothers, when I think of these disorders, and I regard these sins almost as that of which Jesus Christ speaks, which is forgiven neither in this world nor in the next—sins for whose expiation there may perhaps no longer be a victim, since it is this very victim that is being outraged; sins for whose pardon there is scarcely any likelihood that the Savior will intercede, since it is the Savior himself, even as our mediator and our advocate, who is offended in his own house, in a time of adoration and prayer, at the very moment he is immolating himself to appease the wrath of his Father.

But let us leave these scandalous profaners; I have the consolation of speaking to a more religious congregation. Nevertheless, my brothers, however religious I believe you to be, how many are found among you who assist at the sacrifice of our altars, at the very least, only as the Gentiles assisted at the sacrifice of the cross, with cold indifference? One comes to Mass because it is the custom to come. One is content to roll a rosary between one’s fingers, or to say some vocal prayers without attention and without

knowing what one is saying. It is not, my brothers, that I disapprove of these rosaries or these vocal prayers; God forbid; I myself make it my profession to preach their virtue and their advantages. But must not the heart have some part in it? Must one not unite oneself, as far as one can, to the intention of the Church, to the sacrifice of her God and her spouse? What are you doing, my brother? said Saint Chrysostom on a similar subject. The Lamb of God is immolated for you; the priest, in the name of the Church, is in prayer for your salvation; the fire of the Holy Spirit issues from the holy table to pass into your heart; one comes to draw from the pierced side of the Savior the blood that must serve your sanctification, and you remain insensible to this mystery, you assist at it with as much indifference as if it did not concern you at all! What are you doing, O man? The Lamb of God is immolated for you, and you are not confounded!

I would wish, then, my brothers, that one might attend the sacrifice of our religion as those pious women, of whom mention is made in the Gospel, attended that of Calvary. They wept bitterly, and, seized with keen sorrow, would gladly have offered themselves to expiate, by their own immolation, the sins for which this God, though innocent, suffered the penalty. What would have been your sentiments, if you had been present on Calvary, as you are at the altar? With what eyes would you have looked upon that sacrifice of Jesus Christ dying on the cross? What would have been the state of your heart at the sight of his blood and his wounds? Ah! would that now your faith, by a reasonable transport, might inspire in you, at the foot of the altars, the same dispositions you would have had at the foot of the cross, since it is the same victim who is immolated on the altar, and since the Savior does invisibly at Mass what he did visibly on Calvary.

I would wish further that you might do, within yourselves, what the eternal Father did in the world to honor the sacrifice of his Son. He seemed to make all nature share in the sacrifice of the cross: the sun was eclipsed, the

rocks were split, the earth trembled. Let your religion, I say, do likewise during the sacrifice of the Mass. Let it eclipse the sun; let it forbid your mind the use of its lights, that it may hold them captive under the empire of faith; let it suspend your thoughts, that it may apply them to this mystery of love; let it break your heart with the bitter regret of your faults; let it make the earth of your body tremble with sensible and outward adorations of this infinite majesty; and it is thus that you will worthily assist at this august sacrifice of religion for the glory of the eternal Father, at this powerful sacrifice of propitiation for the remission of your sins. It is thus that you will proclaim the death of the Lord, and that you will merit to possess him in blessed eternity. Amen.

ON THE DISPOSITIONS THAT MUST BE BROUGHT TO COMMUNION,

Preached in the Church of Saint-Amé at Douai, on the Anniversary of a Celebrated Miracle that Occurred in that Church in the Thirteenth Century.

"The grace of God our Savior has appeared to instruct us."
(Titus 2)

This miracle, whose various circumstances furnished Billuart the subject and the division of this discourse, is reported by Thomas of Cantimpré, a writer of the thirteenth century, a religious of the Order of Saint Dominic, and an eyewitness of the event. He recorded it in a work entitled The Universal Good, Concerning Bees. This work is a kind of hagiographic collection, written in the Latin of the Middle Ages. In giving here the translation of the passage where the miracle is related, we must note that this translation is Billuart's own.

Douai is a large and spacious city, situated to the right of the road that leads from Cambrai to Arras. There, in the church of the canons of Saint-Amé, a priest, having distributed holy communion to the people at Eastertime, saw with fright the body of Jesus Christ lying on the bare ground. Having knelt down to pick it up, it rose of itself into the air and came to attach itself to the linen cloth with which the priest is accustomed to purify his consecrated fingers.

At the priest's cries as he calls the canons, they run and see on the cloth a body full of life, under the form of a very beautiful child. The people having at once assembled, this spectacle is shown to them, and none of those present was deprived of this heavenly vision.

Having learned of this prodigy through the report that spread of it, I came to Douai; I approached the dean of the church, to whom I was very well known, and asked to see the miracle. He commanded that I be satisfied. The box is opened; the people run up, and as soon as the box was opened, all cried out: There he is, I see him; there he is, I see him, my Savior. I stood there, greatly surprised not to see anything but the figure of a very white bread, recognizing nothing in myself, however, that prevented me from seeing, along with the others, this most holy body.

While I was occupied with these thoughts, suddenly I saw the face of Jesus Christ in the fullness of his age. He wore on his head a crown of thorns, and two drops of blood trickled from his brow down the sides of his nose.

At once I adored him on my knees, with tears in my eyes. Then, having risen, I no longer saw any crown upon the head, nor any blood, but the face of a respectable man above every other figure, turned to the right, so that one could barely see the right eye. The nose was quite long and quite straight, the eyebrows arched, the eyes very simple and lowered. Long hair fell down over the shoulders. The beard was in its natural state, curled up and lowered beneath the chin. The mouth was most agreeable. On both sides of the chin there were small hairless spaces, as commonly happens with young men who have grown their beard since childhood. The forehead was broad, the cheeks thin, the neck long, and the head slightly bent. Such is the portrait and the beauty of this most gracious face. In the space of an hour it was seen in different manners. Some saw it stretched out on the cross; others as coming to judgment; and several, indeed most, under the figure of a child.

See Thomas of Cantimpré: The Universal Good, Concerning Bees, book II, chapter 40, section 11.

SERMON

Everything that Jesus Christ did in this world, my brothers, he did for our instruction and our salvation. If he is born poor in a stable, it is to inspire in us the contempt of the grandeurs and the riches of the earth. If he converses with men in the course of his life, it is to instruct them in the eternal truths and to teach them the ways of salvation. If he works miracles, it is to convince them of the truth of his mission. If he dies upon a cross, it is to give us a perfect model of patience and to deliver us from eternal death: the grace of God our Savior has appeared to instruct us. Can one doubt, my brothers, that in this celebrated miracle he worked in this church—a miracle that appeared publicly before the eyes of your fathers, and whose memory gathers you together today within these walls; a surprising and singular miracle in which this Man-God let himself be seen under the different figures of a child, a savior, and a judge in a consecrated host; an authentic miracle, attested in every particular, confirmed by a constant tradition across several centuries, avowed by the devotion of the peoples, reported by a faithful and irreproachable historian, the most illustrious and most blessed Thomas of Cantimpré, a contemporary author, an eyewitness of this event and one of the richest ornaments of the religion I have the honor to profess—can you doubt, I say, that Jesus Christ, in this miracle, had chiefly in view our instruction, and may I not say, on this subject, what the Apostle said of the actions of his mortal life: that the grace of God our Savior has appeared to instruct us?

Indeed, what fund of instruction do we not find in this miracle? I see there first the reality of the body of Jesus Christ established in a manner such as to convince the most stubborn heretics, and I would not it is to instruct them in eternal truths and teach them the ways of salvation. If he works miracles, it is to convince them of the truth of his mission. If he dies on a cross, it is to give us a perfect model of patience and deliver us from eternal death: the grace of

God our Savior has appeared, training us. Can we doubt, my brothers, that in this celebrated miracle which he wrought in this very church — a miracle that appeared publicly before the eyes of your fathers, and whose memory gathers you together today within these walls; a miracle astonishing and singular, in which this God-Man showed himself under the different forms of a child, a savior, and a judge within a consecrated host; a miracle authentic and verified in every respect, confirmed by an unbroken tradition of several centuries, acknowledged by the devotion of the people, and recorded by a faithful and irreproachable historian, the most illustrious and blessed Thomas of Cantimpré, a contemporary author and eyewitness of this wonder, and one of the richest ornaments of the religion I have the honor to profess — can we doubt, I say, that Jesus Christ, in this miracle, had chiefly in view our instruction? And may I not say of it what the Apostle said of the deeds of his mortal life: that the grace of God our Savior has appeared to instruct us — the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us. Indeed, what a wealth of instruction do we not find in this miracle! I see in it, first, the reality of the body of Jesus Christ established in a manner capable of convincing the most obstinate heretics, and I would have no difficulty believing that God had this purpose in working this wonder, had he performed it in those unhappy times when the errors of Berengarius, and later those of Calvin, stirred the faithful to revolt against this dogma of the Church. But since it took place in an age when the Church was at peace on this point, we may presume that he meant rather to instruct Catholics than to confound heretics; and it seems natural to explain that, by this miracle, he wished to teach us what he is toward us in this adorable sacrament, and what we ought to be toward him when we wish to approach it. What is Jesus Christ for us in the Eucharist? An object of love; he tells us so by appearing under the endearing features of childhood. A victim of expiation; this is what he declares to us as a suffering savior. A God terrible toward those who abuse him; this is what he teaches us in his character as

judge. And what ought we to be toward him when we wish to receive him in communion? Children, through the innocence of our conduct; men crucified, through the severity of our penance; subjects submissive, through our reverent fear. These, my brothers, are the great lessons which Jesus Christ comes to give us in the miracle whose memory we celebrate: this will be the subject of the discourses I shall have the honor of delivering to you during this octave.

Today I shall confine myself to explaining what Jesus Christ demands of us through this threefold apparition. What has led me to make these dispositions the subject of my first discourse is the season of the paschal communion upon which we have now entered. You who have already made your communion will learn from what I am about to say whether you approached it worthily, and whether, perhaps, you have cause to do penance for it rather than to congratulate yourselves. As for you who have not yet fulfilled this obligation, I shall forewarn you against the faults you might commit in doing so. This, then, is my whole design: first, Jesus Christ, appearing under the form of a child in the consecrated host, demands purity and innocence of life; second, under the form of a suffering savior, he requires the rigors of penance; third, in his character as judge, he demands our reverent fear. These are the three dispositions necessary for communion. Divine child, adorable Savior, dreadful Judge, do not allow me to stray from the great truths you have come to teach us; make me a worthy minister of your word. Holy Spirit, you who formed this adorable body in the womb of the purest of virgins, I ask this grace of you through the intercession of Mary. Hail, Mary.

First Point

When I consider the Son of God in heaven, in the stable at Bethlehem, and upon our altars, and reflect that in these three states he proceeds from some principle, I recognize in him three births, or generations, as different from one

another as they are beyond our comprehension. In the first, he is the term of his Father's knowledge before all ages. In the second, he is the fruit of his Mother's womb in the fullness of time. In the third, he is the effect of the words of his ministers, and will remain so until the end of the ages. In his eternal generation, he proceeds from the understanding of his Father as God. In his temporal generation, he is conceived in the womb of his Mother as man. In his sacramental generation, he is brought forth by the word of the priest under the form of bread. Begotten of God amid the splendor of the saints, he chooses the bosom of his Father as his eternal dwelling. Conceived of Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he dwells within her for nine months. Brought forth by the word of the priest upon our altars, he chooses the heart of man as his dwelling until the end of the ages. Yes, says Saint Chrysostom, this divine Word who was in the beginning and before all ages, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made, in whom was life and who is himself life; this Word, equal to his Father through the sharing of the same attributes — wise, powerful, eternal, God as he is God; this Word who sits at the right hand of his Father, whom the heavenly spirits adore, who is the invisible and immortal king of glory; this Word made flesh, son of Mary in the fullness of time, born amid the acclamations of angels, acknowledged by shepherds, adored by kings — is the very same who is born every day in a second infancy, no longer in a stable, but in our churches, upon our altars, in order to give himself to us, to dwell in our hearts, and to remain with us until the end of time: behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Ah, what dwelling could be worthy of this divine child, what purity great enough to receive him? His dwelling in the bosom of his Father is worthy of him; there he finds the source of all purity, purity itself in its essence. The womb of Mary held no horror for him; she was the purest of all virgins; he had filled her with a fullness of grace and adorned her with every virtue. He does not disdain to enter into the hearts of men; he has made them his delight,

as he himself tells us. But what candor, what purity, what innocence does he not require in that heart?

That it should be guilty of no mortal sin, someone will say at once. Yes, without doubt, my brothers, he requires this. The Eucharist is a sacrament of the living, and the sinner is a rotting corpse. A heart defiled by mortal sin is the enemy of God, the slave and partisan of the devil. What horror it would be to receive Jesus Christ into such a heart! What sacrilege, to join him to it and subject him to the devil! This is what Saint Paul calls crucifying Christ afresh, trampling his blood underfoot, and eating one's own judgment. He requires, then, it is true, that your heart be free of all mortal sin. But that is not all. This preparation is necessary in order not to receive him sacrilegiously; it does not suffice to receive him as worthily as you can and ought. It is a preparation of necessity, but not, if I may use the term, of full merit. All the apostles, except Judas, were free of mortal sin, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ himself: you are clean, but not all of you. Yet he was not content with this preparation alone; before admitting them to the participation of his body, he wished to purify them still further by washing their feet — so much so that he threatened to exclude Peter forever from his table and his friendship if he resisted further: if I do not wash you, you shall have no part with me. What, then, my brothers, is required, and what purity does he demand of you when you wish to receive him in holy communion? Open, open this tabernacle; recall to memory that celebrated miracle which took place before the eyes of your fathers. Consider this God of purity who appears under the form of a child in the consecrated host. What does he say to you? What does he come to teach you? For it is, without doubt, for your instruction that he wrought this wonder: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us. Ah, do not doubt it, my dear listener: he comes to repeat to you that great maxim he once preached in the world: unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Christians, if you do not become like little

children, if you do not possess as much purity of heart, as much simplicity of spirit, as much innocence of life as these little ones, you will never enter heaven, you will never have a place at my table: unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Do you understand, my brothers? Heaven suffers nothing that is stained; an extreme purity of heart is required of the blessed in order to enjoy the sight of God in heaven. Is any less required to possess this same God in communion? Purity is necessary to the saints in heaven because they are inseparably united to God; their degree of union with God in glory is measured by their degree of purity. A Christian who receives communion is intimately united to Jesus Christ; I have said it, he is no less united than a saint in paradise. If, then, the beatific union requires the purity of a child, will the eucharistic union not require it as well? Unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. David, who had only a confused idea of our adorable mysteries, and who recognized only a union of mind and will with God, said that only the innocent and those upright of heart are joined to him: the innocent and the upright have clung to me. And elsewhere, asked who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and dwell in his holy place, he answers that it shall be he whose hands are innocent and whose heart is pure, whose soul is detached from all vanity: the innocent of hands and clean of heart. What would he have said, my brothers, had he known of another, real union of man with the body and blood of Jesus Christ? What purity, what innocence would he not have demanded?

You do not doubt, my brothers, the holiness of life, the purity and innocence of conduct, of Saint Bernard, one of the greatest saints the Church honors. Yet listen to how he speaks of his own dispositions when approaching the altar. I count it, he says, among the great miseries of my life that, impure as I am, I approach the holy table. What confusion for me! A proud man approaches a humbled and annihilated God; an impatient, hot-tempered man approaches a

gentle and mild God; a cruel man approaches a merciful God; and what increases my shame and seals my condemnation is that a humbled God suffers a proud man, a mild God suffers a hot-tempered man, and a merciful God receives the kiss of a cruel man: the humble endures the proud, the gentle the wrathful, and the merciful the cruel. Ah, my brothers, if a great saint, a man so devout, so pure, so attached to God, so detached from the world, felt such a sense of his own unworthiness on approaching the holy table, what purity ought you not to bring to it? Should it be any less than that of a child in its tenderest years? I shall complete your conviction with an event the Gospel relates of the Son of God. While he was in Judea, people brought children to him that he might touch them. His disciples were displeased and wanted to prevent them from coming to him. What, do you think, were the feelings of this loving Savior? Far from approving his disciples' conduct, he rebukes them, he is indignant with them, he commands them to let the children approach. Let the little children come to me, he says, do not hinder them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them. Does it not seem to you, my brothers, that he repeats these same words to you today, in this sacred place where he appears under the form of a child? Ministers of my altars, keep far from me those worldly men and women, those half-Christians attached to the world and full of its maxims, its corruption, and its malice; cast them from my table. But let those holy souls approach in whom you observe the purity, the simplicity, the candor, and the innocence of children; let them come to me, do not hinder them. These are the ones worthy of my favor and entitled to my table.

Know, then, my brothers, that this is the state in which God wishes to find you in order to receive him in the Eucharist. It is to this second childhood of manners that you must reduce yourselves in order to receive communion worthily; and to explain this more fully, let us pass from the image to the reality. What is a child? It is, answers Tertullian, truly a perfect human being,

a rational animal, but one not yet in possession of the use of reason. He believes without argument everything he is told; he bears without seeking revenge whatever is done to him; he is enemy to no one; he is guilty of no crime; he is subject to no passion. He is without anger, without envy, without hatred, without vanity, without avarice, without ambition; or if he has any passions at all, they are wholly innocent. His mind is naive and simple, without guile or pretense; his body is pure and chaste; his eyes have not yet cast a lascivious glance; his tongue has not yet uttered an indecent word; his hands have not yet committed any evil deed; his heart has not yet been corrupted by any unlawful love, nor his will disordered by any criminal desire. He knows nothingof rage, of resentment, of vengeance. He laughs in the arms of an executioner who strangles him just as he laughs at the breast of the nurse who caresses him: an infant who is no one's enemy, guilty toward no one, a son to all, laughing even beneath the knife. There, my brothers, there is the true portrait of a child, and it is the model of a Christian who is to receive communion: unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Examine yourselves now, my brothers; compare your present state with that of your childhood past. Do your eyes, your hands, your tongue, all the senses of your body, still have the purity of your childhood? Does your mind still have its first simplicity, your heart its first innocence, your will its first submission — in a word, do all the powers of your soul and all the members of your body still bear the mark of the grace of baptism? If this is so, approach the altar; the bosom of Mary is opened to you there, the wounds of Jesus are laid open to you there. Draw the milk from his mother's breast, draw the blood from the Son's side. This divine child permits it, he invites you to it; you have a right to his table and his feast.

Second Point

But if you do not have this purity of life and this innocence of conduct, if your heart is enslaved to your passions, if your mind is corrupted by the maxims of the age — Christians, do not approach. This milk would become poison for you; this blood would bring you death instead of life. Withdraw, then. But what am I saying? If you withdraw, you deprive yourself of life; if you do not eat this bread, you are threatened with death, and with eternal death. What, then, will you do? Here is the answer, my brothers: approach, but first expiate your crimes, repair the disorders of your life, and recover your first innocence through the rigors of penance. This is the second disposition God requires of you, in default of the first. This is what he comes to teach you today under the form of a suffering Savior: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us. And this is the subject of my second point. The Apostle, writing to his disciple Timothy, tells him that dangerous times will come, in which men will be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, wicked, without natural affection, without faith, slanderers, without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good, traitors, reckless, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power: know this, that in the last days perilous times shall come. Have we not arrived, my brothers, at these dangerous times foretold by the Apostle? Is this not the character of the Christians of our age and the true portrait of their conduct? Judge, then, whether I am right to maintain that penance is necessary for them, and that they must prove themselves through holy rigors, as the Apostle says, when they wish to approach the sacrament of our altars? I know it will be said at once that there are few Christians who fail to take this wise precaution and who do not do penance before approaching the holy table. But allow me to ask in what this penance consists and how it is performed. One thinks of going to

confession on the evening before communion. After a brief examination and a few acts of contrition found in a book and recited by rote, one confesses in haste and in the crowd, and passes at once from the tribunal of penance to the table of angels. You will not contradict me, my brothers: this is the common practice of Christians today, and especially of the greatest sinners. Nothing is more common than to see men wholly corrupt, Lazaruses still buried in their iniquity, dead not for four days but for four months, or four years, presenting themselves before the Church and, filled with presumptuous confidence, demanding all at once to be raised from the dead and seated at the table of the Lord. And you call this doing penance, expiating your disorders, recovering your first innocence! You believe by this to have sufficiently tested yourselves, as Saint Paul puts it! You believe by this to have acquired purity enough to partake worthily of the body and blood of Jesus Christ! Ah, my brothers, allow me to say it to you once more: you are in error and illusion, and it is to undeceive you that heaven opens today, and that the spotless Lamb presents himself to you as a suffering and crucified Savior: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us. I come, then, to tell you openly what this man of sorrows tells you in a silent language from the midst of our altars. Sinners by profession, whoever you may be, who wish to receive Jesus Christ in communion, I declare to you today, in his name and on his behalf, that you must not approach him except after having prepared yourselves by a severe and austere penance, by a penance absolute and universal, by a penance long meditated and long practiced, by a penance proportioned to the number and enormity of your crimes — by a penance, in short, strong enough and long enough to recover, as far as you are able, your first innocence, and to make yourselves conform to this suffering God-Man, whom Saint Jerome rightly calls the prince of penitents and the head of those who are saved through penance. Listen, then, you who, in the profession you make of a worldly and dissipated life, rarely approach the sacred mysteries, and who content

yourselves, perhaps, with eating two or three times a year this bread which Jesus Christ established to be our daily bread — listen, for it is to you that I speak. As for innocent souls who make it their ordinary food, though they have every reason to fear, they have still greater reason to hope. One communion disposes them to another; the regular life they lead, the good works they practice, their assiduous attendance at the altars — all this, in the teaching of the Fathers, serves them as preparation, and as a continual preparation for the divine sacrament. But as for you who follow a wholly opposite course; you who make it a point of honor not merely to belong to the world, but to live by its maxims; you whose friendships, habits, amusements, and occupations form nothing but an unbroken chain of sins added ceaselessly one to another; you who make no use whatever of the things of God, and who pass whole months and years without giving almost a single serious thought to the matter of your salvation; you whose last concern is to watch over your heart, and who, having formed for yourselves a free conscience — let us rather say, a licentious conscience — find nothing more convenient than never to look into it and always to remain ignorant of what passes there; you, finally, who receive communion I know not by what convention, and, when the precept and custom oblige you to it, wait to prepare yourselves until the very day you must fulfill this obligation, content yourselves with a superficial and hasty confession as your only preparation — this is to despise your God, to insult his sacrament, to nullify the effect of his coming, to fail to discern the body of Jesus Christ, as Saint Paul reproaches those who receive communion unworthily; and this is precisely what this divine Savior comes to condemn in the miracle of this day. To convince you of this important truth, allow me to go back to the earliest centuries of the Church, and to examine for a moment what her discipline was on the subject I am treating. Saint Augustine distinguishes three kinds of penance: that for mortal sins committed before baptism; that for mortal sins committed after baptism; and the penance for

venial sins committed likewise after baptism. These three kinds of penance held, in the early Church, different relations to communion. Participation in the body of Jesus Christ was absolutely forbidden to those in the first kind of penance — that is, to catechumens. It was frequently permitted to those doing penance for venial sins, because this divine sacrament has the power to blot them out by increasing the fervor of charity. But as for those in the second order of penance, the penance for mortal sins, since their penance had to be, as Saint Augustine says, heavier and more sorrowful, communion was deferred to them. They were deprived, adds Saint Thomas, of participation in the sacrament of the altar, lest, receiving it unworthily, they should eat and drink their own judgment and condemnation. But if they were penitents, you will say, how could they receive communion unworthily? Here is how: it is, says Saint Augustine, that to confound the exercises of penance with communion, to receive communion at a time when one ought still to be doing penance, is to make neither a perfect penance nor a true communion — it is to receive communion unworthily. Words worthy of all your reflection, my brothers, words well able to alarm those reckless sinners to whom I speak, if they still have any religion left in them. There are sinners, said Saint Ambrose, complaining of certain Christians who were beginning to relax this holy discipline — there are certain sinners who approach the sacrament of penance only in order to receive communion immediately after. What insufferable audacity! What insolent presumption! What then! Need one only commit crimes at will — acts of vengeance, fornication, adultery, slander, theft — and then, with no other preparation than an ordinary confession, approach the altar with brazen effrontery to receive the body of the Son of God? Many, indeed, seek penance only that communion may be restored to them at once. I know, my brothers, that the Church may sometimes change her conduct in matters of pure discipline; but I know also that in matters of doctrine and morals, such as the one I am treating, she is as incapable of change as he himself who purified

her with his blood. Her spirit, her principles concerning the necessity of penance for worthy communion, are the same today as at her birth. They are founded on the enormity of sin and the holiness of the body of Jesus Christ. Now, asks my angelic doctor, was sin among the first Christians more enormous than it is among us? Was the body of Jesus Christ, which they were to receive, more holy and more venerable for them than it is for us? Besides, what does this forty days' fast mean, which the Church still enjoins upon you today as a preparation for the paschal communion? Is this not an incontestable proof that she still maintains, now as then, that penance is necessary for worthy communion? Let no one, then, oppose to me any supposed contrary practice of the Church of today. This is a mistake; it is an error, a calumny. It is neither the spirit nor the practice of the Church, but that of bad Christians; it is a scandalous abuse introduced against the pure intentions of this holy Mother by the laxity of her children and the cowardice of her ministers — a monstrous abuse against which I must and can protest with as much force and justice as Saint Cyprian did in his own time. Ah, my brothers, said this great bishop, to what state are we reduced? A dangerous plague has crept into the Church, an evil all the more to be feared for deceiving more subtly under the pretext of devotion: against the rigor of the Gospel, against the law of God, through the laxity and rashness of certain directors, holy communion is given — not to the sacrilegious, to usurers, to open adulterers who have not confessed, but to people who present themselves at the holy table without preparation, without reflection, without prayer, without good works, in short, without penance and without the dispositions demanded by the most important act of Christianity. Ah, communion — false and deceptive communion, dangerous to the priests who permit it, useless to those who receive it: a vain and false peace, dangerous to those who give it and profitless to those who receive it. What could be more just than this complaint, and can such an abuse be viewed without indignation? What! Shall the body of Jesus Christ be given

over to Christians who have not yet expiated the crimes by which they crucified him afresh; to Christians who have done no penance whatsoever for their scandalous lives; to Christians who have made no satisfaction for the wrongs done to their neighbor, who have not yet restored the goods they stole by fraud or injustice, who have not yet repaired the honor they took away through their slander, who have not yet forgiven an injury, who are not yet reconciled with their enemies, who have not yet broken off their sinful attachments, nor abandoned the occasions of their sins — in a word, to relapsed Christians still full of the infection of their crimes, who, like dogs, as Scripture says, will soon return to their own vomit? Is there, I ask, a more pernicious abuse, a more scandalous profanation, more deserving of our tears and our indignation? But speak yourself, Lord, from this sacred place where you appear today; speak, instruct my listeners, or rather, my brothers, cast your own eyes upon this man of sorrows; consider this model and this prince of penitents. Is there any part of his body that does not preach penance to you and confirm the truth I am preaching? Behold the man! Behold this man whom you wish to receive, whom you wish to eat, to whom you wish to unite yourselves through communion. Ah, could you unite a head reeking of pride to this head crowned with thorns; a mouth still full of blasphemies and slanders to this mouth, so pure, which prays for its enemies; a painted and lustful face to this bruised and livid countenance; eyes still full of adultery, vengeance, and impurity to these dying and mortified eyes; hands still stained with his blood and defiled by so many dishonest touches to these hands pierced for love of you? Would you dare, I ask, to receive into a heart that still breathes nothing but softness, worldliness, and vanity, this sacred heart, contrite and humbled for your sins? Ah, monstrous union, scandalous alliance, sacrilegious profanation! This I say to those who receive communion. I speak with Saint Chrysostom, and what I have just said applies to those who receive communion; but permit me now to address, with the same freedom, the priests

and pastors, and to remind them with what care and precaution they must distribute this supreme gift of the love of Jesus Christ. Ministers of the altar, priests of Jesus Christ, the vengeance of God will fall upon your heads if you admit the unworthy to the holy table. God will hold you accountable for the blood of his Son if you make profaners drink it. Your ministry, raising you above all other mortals — it is still Saint Chrysostom speaking — you must show no partiality to anyone. No consideration of propriety, no human respect, ought to stand in the way of your duty. Whoever presents himself at the altar — even were he one of the gods of the earth — if by his evil life or lack of preparation you recognize him unworthy to partake of the divine mysteries, forbid him, cast him from the holy table, refuse him communion. You can do this, and you must; your authority in this matter is superior to his own; and God has honored you by making you the steward of his power and minister of his altars only so that you might discern the unworthy and prevent the profanation of this adorable sacrament.

Thus, I say, spoke Saint Chrysostom to the clergy of Antioch; thus may and must I speak to the priests and pastors of this city. But I return to you, my brothers, and in closing this second part I present to you once more Jesus Christ, this fair mirror of penance: look, and do according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. Look, and be attentive to the lessons he gives you, and strive, through your penance, to copy this divine original. Look upon the crown of thorns upon his head — proud man, behold this head bristling with thorns; what does it preach to you but humility and contempt for greatness? Look upon his wasted cheeks — worldly girls and women, behold this emaciated face. Does it not reproach you for your scandalous immodesty, your paint, and all your pompous display of vanity? Does it not condemn that violent passion you have for appearing beautiful and pleasing the eyes

of men? Look upon his simple and downcast eyes — behold these eyes modestly lowered; they accuse the immodesty and impurity of your own glances; they exhort you to a holy indifference toward the false glitter of worldly vanities and earthly riches. Look upon his bent head — vindictive souls, behold this bowed head; it tells you that, after the example of your God, you must forgive your enemies and suffer injuries patiently. Look upon the drops of blood running down his face — sinners, whoever you are, behold these drops of blood flowing down this sacred countenance. They warn you of the tears of penance that must flow from your own eyes to wash away your sins. Look, and do according to the pattern — consider, I say, attentively this divine Savior; profit from the example he gives you and the favor he grants you; and having made yourselves conform to this divine model by imitating his penance, approach him with reverent fear. This is another disposition demanded of you by his character as judge, under which he appeared to your fathers, and it is the subject of my third point. I shall conclude briefly. The presence of God ought everywhere to inspire us with veneration and respect, because it fills all things by its immensity, and consecrates them by its holiness, making the whole universe but one temple. But of all the places rendered venerable to us by this divine presence, none ought to produce in us greater sentiments of respect and deeper awe than that in which repose the sacred species of the Eucharist. There is the throne of God's glory on earth, where he causes his holy humanity to reside in order to receive our homage and enrich us with his favors; it is the holiest place in the world, since it contains the author of all sanctification. The works of grace he performs there are inexplicable; the mysteries he renews there are beyond comprehension. All his adorable perfections appear there in their full splendor and immeasurably heighten the glory of his humanity. There dwells the same God-Man whom Peter dared not approach, whom the centurion begged not to

enter his house, believing himself unworthy of his presence. What am I saying? It is the city of God, it is the heavenly Jerusalem, where dwells all that is most august in heaven — the adorable Trinity, accompanied by a multitude of heavenly spirits who, out of reverence, cover their faces before this great God. It is, finally, the throne of the judge of the living and the dead, and it is to convince you of this that he appears today in this character within the consecrated host. Ah, if it was permitted to enter the sanctuary of Moses only trembling, with what dread must one be seized who approaches this judge, full of infinite majesty, before whom all the pillars of heaven tremble at the slightest sign of his will! If the Israelites were permitted to look upon the ark only beneath the veil that covered it, shall a Christian be permitted to look upon, to touch, to eat without reverence the body of his judge, of whom the ark was but the figure? Daniel thought he would die of fear at the sight of an angel who appeared to him, and you, Christians, do not tremble at the sight of your judge, who not only presents himself to you but wishes to enter your house and dwell there, who wishes to unite himself to you and become one with you!

Tremble, my soul; tremble, my heart, that bear this precious burden which heaven itself cannot sustain without trembling. Great God, have mercy on me, cried out a great saint. I am seized with dread when I must approach this awesome mystery. My soul is deeply moved, my heart trembles, my spirit fails. Sustain me, Lord, and bear yourself my unworthiness and my weakness, if you wish it to bear your greatness. We venerate and we tremble, when we approach your holy altar. Thus will you think, thus will you speak, my brothers, if, following the light of your faith, you reflect on the grandeurs of this august sacrament. But that faith is extinguished in you; it is obscured by the thick clouds of your passions. You no longer believe these truths, or you believe them only feebly and without reflection. And what follows from this? The most intolerable of all disorders. Men enter our sanctuaries with as much

freedom as into their own drawing rooms; they behave there with as little restraint as in worldly gatherings and society. Our churches have become like public squares. The same irreverence, the same immodesty, the same distraction; and, to crown this impiety, irreverence is often carried right up to the foot of the tabernacle and to the holy table itself. Ah, my brothers, Saint Chrysostom once exclaimed at a similar disorder in his own time: where do you think you are? Do you imagine our altars are theatres, the God we adore a painted king, our mysteries mere comedies? If I were preaching in some other church than the one where I have the honor of appearing, I would ask God for a miracle to awaken the faith of my listeners and to keep them in a spirit of respect in his presence. But this miracle has already occurred; it took place in this very temple; it happened before the eyes of your fathers, and we still celebrate its memory today, and yet you are neither more holy nor more respectful of the presence of this dread judge. Ah, how I fear, my brothers, that what is an effect of God's particular providence toward you may one day become the cause of your condemnation! He presents himself to you today as judge, in order to inspire in you here below, out of respect for his majesty, sentiments of wholesome fear, and to be able to receive you as a father in eternity. You do not profit from his lessons; you abuse his graces. What can you expect but that he will be your judge in eternity, according to the warning he has already given you in time? Strive, then, my brothers, to avert this supreme misfortune; be attentive to his divine instructions, sensitive to his boundless mercies, obedient to his loving warnings; for it is for you, for your salvation, that he has wrought this wonder: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us.

Divine Jesus, loving child, grant me this purity of heart; restore to me that first innocence whose ravishing image you present to us so especially today. Adorable Savior, model of true penitents, make me a faithful copy of this bloodied original. Impress upon my heart a single drop of that precious blood

which flows from your sacred head, to wash away my disorders and make me worthy of your presence. Sovereign Judge, infinite Majesty, restrain the insolence and license of my senses; impress upon my soul so vivid a fear of your presence that this sentiment may govern all my thoughts and hold all my faculties gathered and occupied with your greatness, so that, having adored and served you with reverent love in this life, I may possess you with joy in blessed eternity. Amen.

ON THE MOTIVES FOR DEVOTION TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT

The grace of God our Savior has appeared to save us. (Titus 2.)

It is astonishing, my brothers, that God, who is so great, so lovable in himself, should employ so many devices and use such powerful and extraordinary means to draw our worship and win our love. As though he did not have attractions enough in the excellence of his own nature, he has chosen to go outside himself to find, in states foreign to him, some further means of making himself beloved. At times he commands us to adore and love him; at other times he threatens us with the flames of his wrath, in order to kindle in our souls the flames of his love. He descends into a manger and takes upon himself our weaknesses and our miseries. Before mounting the cross and there pouring out all his blood for our salvation, as a final effort of his love, he institutes the sacrament of our altars, in order to draw true worshippers to himself from every corner of the earth, and at last to triumph over our stubborn resistance to loving him. He hides himself under the appearances of bread and wine, and remains in our tabernacles with all the charms of love, in order to captivate our hearts there. It is, no doubt, to instruct us in these great truths that he appears today in a host under the form of a child: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us. There he is humbled; there he is lovable, as a child is lovable. Now, his humiliations demand our homage, and his charms deserve our love. He abases himself in this mystery in order to be adored. He gives himself to us in it in order to be loved. He can do nothing greater for the glory of his body; he can devise nothing more advantageous for the good of our souls. It is the throne of the glory of his body, where he wishes to be adored in his self-emptying; it is the throne of his mercies, where he

wishes to be loved amid his favors. His sovereign power shines forth amid the humiliations of this sacramental childhood; therefore we must adore him. His love triumphs with all the charms and attractions of childhood; therefore we must love him.

First Point

If the Apostle truly said that the Son of God emptied himself in his Incarnation, I may say with equal justice that he emptied himself still further in the institution of the sacrament of our altars. When I contemplate him being born in a stable, I see him, it is true, under the form of a little child, stripped of all the grandeurs of the Godhead, burdened with all the weaknesses of infancy. The Word has become mute and seems unable to form a single word. His eyes are closed, and his eyelids are still too weak to bear the light; he weeps, he moans, he sighs, and utters only that first cry common to the rest of mortals, which, as Tertullian says, announces all the miseries of life — a voice that is itself the proof of life's hardships. But if I pass from the stable into our churches, I find him there, it is true, really and substantially present; yet I find also that his self-emptying is more inconceivable still. Nothing of the man appears there. There are eyes, and he does not see; ears, and he does not hear; a mouth, and he cannot speak; feet and hands, and he cannot act or move; incapable, in a word, of naturally performing any function of life.

It is true that, having taken in his Incarnation the form of a servant and the likeness of a sinner, he was unknown, despised, and persecuted in the world. Nevertheless, one could sometimes discern upon his countenance certain rays of majesty that inspired in those who beheld him feelings of respect and awe. His word, by which he worked so many miracles, was like an echo of that word by which he had created the universe; all the elements revered his power, all creatures obeyed his commands; and in the very moment when,

laden with reproach and overwhelmed with sorrow, he scarcely retained on the cross the appearance of a man, the whole of nature acknowledged his innocence. The whole earth, covering itself in darkness, mourned his death; the rocks were split, the tombs opened, the sun lost its light, and even the Gentiles acknowledged his divinity. Thus this rational being whom he had received through his temporal birth still bore a thousand marks of grandeur and majesty, which drew the veneration of the people, inspired dread in his enemies, and excited universal admiration. But when I turn the eyes of the body upon a host, I see in it no mark of his greatness, no sign of his presence, no vestige of his perfections, no shadow of his body, no ray of his divinity. Insulted by heretics, dishonored by wicked Christians, crucified by unworthy communions, despised and abandoned by nearly all, he suffers, without a word, all these injuries, like the weakest of all men. Ah, may I be permitted, then, to say of this adorable sacrament what the Apostle said of the Incarnation, that Jesus Christ has truly emptied himself in it. Yet, will you believe it, my brothers? It is in this state of self-emptying that he deserves our homage and our adoration. It is on earth — the throne of his glory — that he wishes to be adored; and the lower he has stooped, the more he ought to be revered by us: the more vile he becomes for my sake, the dearer he becomes to me. This is the beautiful saying of Saint Bernard. We must adore him both in his humiliations and for his humiliations. In his humiliations, because faith enables us to discern in them marks of infinite greatness and sovereign power; for his humiliations, because it is for our sake that he has emptied himself. Let us explain these truths. Nothing appears more humble to the eyes of the body, nothing seemingly simpler, than the sacrament of our altars. I have told you: nothing is weaker than this child who appears today before our eyes. But if we attend to the mysteries he comes to teach us, if with the eyes of faith we pierce these eucharistic veils, what do we discover there? The glorious body, the blessed soul, the holy humanity, the divinity of Jesus Christ; the whole august

and adorable Trinity; the whole holy and heavenly Jerusalem; the memorial of the wonders of divine Omnipotence; the extension and perpetuity of all the mysteries of the God-Man; the summary of all the miracles he has ever worked: he has made a remembrance of his wonderful works. Indeed, can this real presence of a God under fragile appearances that have lost their own substance and have nothing to sustain them be called anything else? This destruction of the bread and wine, which retain their color, their quantity, their taste, and yet are changed into the body and blood of a God; this dwelling of a single and indivisible body in heaven and in every place on earth where consecrated hosts exist? Can this obedience of a God to the word of a man — or rather to his own word — be called anything else? This multiplication and this reduction of the body of Jesus Christ; this quality of a flesh which, while remaining truly flesh, possesses the agility, the clarity, the subtlety, the impassibility, the indivisibility proper to spirits? Only a sovereign power could accomplish all these wonders — wonders so great, so rare, so astonishing that the multiplication of the loaves, the changing of water into wine, the raising of the dead, and his other miracles are mere sport compared to this excellent masterpiece of his power. It is, indeed, the almighty Lord who instituted it, the Apostle tells us; and if we believe Saint Augustine, mighty as he is, he could never have done anything greater: being almighty, he could give no more. Yet it is not only in view of these wonders that I admire God's omnipotence in the humiliations of this mystery, but also because he makes use of these very humiliations to draw true worshippers to himself from every corner of the earth. It is no extraordinary thing that God, in the state of his glory, should draw the respect and adoration of men, and that this commanding voice, which breaks the pride of the cedars of Lebanon, should be able to bring down the proudest sentiments of our hearts beneath the sway of his power. But that Jesus Christ, by a wholly contrary course, should humble himself in order to be adored; that he should establish his empire and

his worship by means that seem to work against it — this is undoubtedly a proof of his greatness and an effect of his omnipotence, and this is what he does in instituting the sacrament of our altars. While his body appeared visibly on earth, he made it commendable through the holiness of his teaching, the purity of his conduct, and the splendor of his miracles. Now that he is in heaven, he is revered in the eyes of the blessed by the glory that surrounds him, and with which he is crowned in glorifying the saints; but beneath the veils of the sacrament, says Saint Augustine, he makes his body commendable only through the abasements and humiliations he practices there. How can this be? I can explain it to you no better than through the thought of the blessed Alger, a devout and learned priest of the church of Liège in the twelfth century, and the author of several works, among them a treatise on the body and blood of Our Lord, in three books, first published by Erasmus in 1530 and afterward included in the Library of the Fathers. Jesus Christ, in instituting the sacrament of our altars, intended that his body — hypostatically united to the Godhead — should be rendered the glory and honor it deserves in itself. He wished, moreover, that our adoration should terminate in him alone, and in no other created being. Now, had he chosen, in order to be adored by men, a throne all brilliant with jewels, whose dazzling splendor would have astonished and overwhelmed them; had he appeared as a sovereign, scepter in hand and crown upon his head, surrounded by grandeur and magnificence, one might have said that it was the splendor of his dwelling that drew this public veneration. There might even have been reason to fear that the worship of the temple would have stopped short at this outward brilliance. But having chosen only simple and common elements to enclose his majesty, he thereby makes it known to us that it is to his body alone that we owe our worship, and that whatever state he assumes, we must discern in it something majestic and infinitely great, which must be the true term of our adoration. Let the angels, then, adore him in heaven: adore him, all you his angels. But let men on earth

adore him also upon our altars: adore the Lord in his holy court. That is not all, my brothers. Jesus Christ places himself in this state of self-emptying not only for the glory of his body, but also in order to be our sacrament and our sacrifice. For both of these functions, it was necessary that he humble himself; and had he not humbled himself, says Saint Augustine, we would never have had the happiness of possessing him as our food. Now, my brothers, if it is for your sake that he humbles himself in the sacrament of the altar, it is for you to repay him with a just return through your submission, your respect, and your adoration. Imitate, then, the justice that the eternal Father rendered to this God-Man upon the cross; say, in acknowledgment of his hidden humiliations, what he himself said, through the mouth of the Apostle, concerning the disgraces of his death: at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Ah, Lord, I wish I had the whole world at my disposal, to make it bow before your humbled greatness. I wish I could command heaven, earth, and hell itself to bend the knee before your adorable body. But since I am powerless to do much for you, accept graciously the little I am able to offer you. Within myself I possess a small world which I may dispose of by the privilege of freedom you have given me. I will bid all its parts, then, to render you my respect and my homage. Let all that is heavenly in my mind, all that is earthly in my body, all that is infernal in my passions, let all of it bend, let all of it be humbled before the humiliations of my Savior; let all that is within me adore him in his holy temple. He is great, he is powerful in his humiliations, and it is for my sake that he humbles himself: at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

Come, then, my brothers, to fulfill this duty as exactly and as devoutly as you are able. Come, let us go and adore him, and let us prostrate ourselves humbly at the foot of his altars to render him our homage: come, let us worship and fall down before God. I commend all the devotions the Church approves. But

all others are eclipsed before this one. To seek the assistance of Mary, to enroll in societies that honor her with a particular devotion, is to seek in the Mother an all-powerful mediator upon the heart of her Son. To choose the saints as one's intercessors, to render marks of veneration to their holiness and their power, is a praiseworthy and prudent devotion that addresses itself to favorites of the court in order to obtain certain graces from the Prince. But to enjoy the privilege of going directly to the Prince himself, to adore the God of Mary, the Lord of virtues and of saints, to make it a duty to render our respects assiduously to the most holy sacrament of the altar, where faith tells us he is truly present — this is the first, the most heroic, the most excellent, the most honorable of all devotions. I admire, in Scripture, the eagerness of a great queen who came from the ends of the earth to see Solomon, who remained constantly at his side, and who, charmed by his rare gifts, confessed that all she had heard of him by report was nothing compared to what she witnessed with her own eyes. Behold, my brothers, behold here a God greater than Solomon in all his glory: one greater than Solomon is here. There is no need to cross the seas, no need to expose yourselves to the fatigues and dangers of a long journey, in order to come and adore him. He is in your city, he is at your door, he is in this very temple: behold. He presents himself to you; he comes himself to invite you. Come, then, and let us join together to prostrate ourselves at the foot of his throne: come, let us worship and fall down before God. Saint Mary Magdalene prostrated herself at the feet of the divine Master; there she poured out her perfumes, bathed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair. These acts of humility and piety belong to that blessed woman of old. It is for you, ladies, to renew them. Come, come and adore this same God: come, let us worship. Come and offer him marks of a devotion so fitting and so honorable to your sex; come and prostrate yourselves at his feet. And let us fall down before God. Come and pour out your tears before him, and offer him a sacrifice of your perfumes: let us weep before the Lord who made

us. Mortals, whoever you are, come and render your homage to the humiliations of your God, for it is for you that he humbles himself upon our altars: come, let us worship and fall down before God. But if it is the throne of his glory where he wishes to be adored in his humiliations, it is also the throne of his mercies where he demands our loving attentiveness; and this is what he comes again to teach us under the figure of a lovable child: the grace of God our Savior has appeared, training us.

Second Point

Nothing is so lovable as childhood, nothing more powerfully excites our tenderness and affection. Children, says Saint Bernard, give freely what they have; they surrender themselves willingly to those who caress them; they are gentle, affable, incapable of resentment. Everything about them naturally inspires love, and even in their tears there is something tender and charming that gives rise to a certain blend of pity and love in the hearts of those who behold them. Can we doubt, my brothers, that the loving Jesus intended to awaken in us these same feelings of tenderness and love by showing himself to your fathers under the form of a little child? May we not say of this famous miracle, and of the sacrament of our altars, what Saint Bernard said of the manger — that he took the form of a child in order to make himself more pleasing to our eyes and win our affections? Indeed, never has he appeared with greater charm, never has he shown greater love for mankind, than in the institution of this adorable sacrament. We were sick from that piece of fruit so fatal to our innocence: he came down to earth to be our physician. We were weak: he took our weaknesses upon himself, that he might clothe us with his own strength. We were orphans: he became our guardian. We were lost: he became our savior at the cost of his own life. It was much that he came forth from the bosom of his Father; it is even more that he paid our debts. But when we recall what he does for us at the altar, the mind is astonished, the

imagination is troubled, the very heart is overwhelmed. The whole earth stirs itself to destroy him; the priests assemble for this detestable purpose; Judas, through the blackest of ingratitudes, offers to betray him and seeks his opportunity. Already the price is agreed upon; already a troop of soldiers is set in motion to carry out so execrable a resolve. What does the loving Jesus do in so dreadful an hour? Will you believe it, my brothers, and can I persuade you of it? He gives his body and his blood as food to his enemies; he makes of it, forever, a sacrament in his Church. O love stronger than death! O infinite charity! O inconceivable goodness! After this, my brothers, I ought to fall silent, and let your minds, filled with a high sense of this priceless benefit, supply for the weakness of my thoughts and my words. A God gives his flesh and his blood, his divinity, his humanity, his body, his soul — all that he has and all that he is; to whom? To men who ought rather to be victims of his wrath than objects of his affection and tenderness. But let us not be surprised at this. It is the loving Jesus, says the Apostle, who established this sacrament. Let us seek no other motive for its institution than the love he bears for mankind, and the desire that presses him to belong to them. A magnificent love, and, if I may speak thus with the Fathers, a prodigal love. Not content with having given us his graces, he wished to give himself, the author and the very substance of these graces. Love is generous, and in the teaching of Aristotle, the generous man must be just; but in the standard of my Savior, love must go to the point of excess. In the thought of that philosopher, one must consider how one gives and what one gives; but in the thought of Jesus Christ, one must see whether one has given everything. In the rule prescribed by ordinary morality, it suffices to give of one's own; but in the rule the loving Jesus follows, he must give himself: take and eat. Could his love go any further? Being wholly Savior and wholly Jesus as he is, could he do anything more advantageous for us? To say to God — since he is most rich — he could give no more.

A constant and eternal love. Not content with having sacrificed himself for us, he found the means to remain with us always, through the institution of the adorable Eucharist. O admirable invention of the love of Jesus Christ! He came down from heaven only once to become incarnate, yet he descends at every moment into the consecrated hosts. He was born only once, in a stable, yet he does not disdain to be born every day amid the poor and the wretched. He was crucified only once, on Calvary, yet the memory of that sacrifice is renewed at every hour and in every place. This is no longer a passing sacrifice; it is a permanent sacrifice. It is no longer blood that flowed for a time upon the cross; it is, as Jesus Christ himself says, the blood of a covenant that is at once new and everlasting. Have you truly grasped the meaning of these words, my brothers? When a man is about to die, all he can do is leave to his children and his dearest friends his possessions, and whatever he holds most precious. But as for his own person and his presence, as for the sweet companionship he shared with them and the pleasant conversations with which he honored them — nothing of all this survives his death. He becomes but a shadow of himself. A land of forgetfulness encloses his body; his soul goes wherever it pleases God to send it; and all that remains of him in the world is the fact that he once existed and now exists no more. Your covenant, O loving Jesus, is not of this kind. It is a new covenant, and it is an eternal covenant: a new covenant, since, unlike other covenants, it takes its full effect during the very lifetime of the one who makes it; an eternal covenant, since the one who makes it is immortal and glorious, and, not content with giving us his goods, he actually gives himself in this state of immortality and glory.

The hour of Jesus Christ having come for him to pass out of this world to his Father, the beloved disciple tells us that, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. But what did he do? Knowing that his Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was about to return to him, yet unable, on the other hand, to bring himself to leave the men he loved

— what did he do, I ask? His love, which caused these conflicting impulses, reconciled them. It led him to find the secret of remaining at once in heaven and on earth, so as to satisfy at the same time both the blessed who awaited him and the men who still needed his presence and his consolation. It led him to institute the sacrament of his body and blood, so that, through this mystery of his charity, he might converse and remain forever with them: having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. It is you, then, O divine love, who are the author and the perfecter of this adorable sacrament. Let whoever wishes call it Eucharist, communion, viaticum, sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; say, if you will, that it is the memorial of our redemption, the holocaust of salvation, the divine sacrifice, the holy of holies, the drink of immortality, the bread of blessedness, the pledge of glory. All these names suit it well; but for my part, I am content to call it, with the angelic doctor, the sacrament of love; with Saint Augustine, the bond of love; with Saint Denis, the love of loves. Wisdom of my God, I adore you in this mystery; you conceived its means. Sovereign power, I admire you; you carried them out. Divine justice, I praise you; you ordained them. But, O Love, it is you who triumph. It is you who presided over this great work; it is you who are its principle and its end. It is you who, having begun the life of Jesus, do not end with it. Stronger than death, you compel him to remain with us to the end of the ages: having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. What does all this ask of us, my brothers? What the devoted and affectionate attentiveness would ask of the most sincere, the most amiable, the most tender, the most constant, the most disinterested, the most generous of all friends. Would you have enough ingratitude and discourtesy to leave him alone in a place where he came only to wait for you? Out of gratitude or courtesy, out of love or self-interest, out of justice or inclination, would you not interrupt — not merely your pleasures, but your most serious occupations — to acknowledge the honor he would do you, to converse with him, to ask

his counsel, to implore his protection over your affairs and his help in your needs, to pour out your heart into his own? I make no false supposition here. Either you have no faith, or you must believe that this is truly what passes between Jesus Christ and you. Be convinced of it: he is the most sincere of all friends. He says nothing that he does not do. He says that he wishes to remain with you until the end of the ages, and, indeed, he does remain. Your fathers saw him with the eyes of the body; do you see him today with the eyes of faith, beneath the sacramental appearances? He is the most loving and the most tender of all friends. He forgets what he is; he sets aside his own greatness in order to take pleasure in being with us. The splendor of his majesty would overwhelm you, and you could not endure his presence, were he to show himself to you in his glory. He hides it, he tempers it, this glory; and whereas God formerly showed himself to the Jews only to leave in their souls impressions of fear and trouble, today he shows himself upon our altars only to fill us with consolation and joy.

He is the most disinterested and the most constant of all friends. He gives himself wholly to all, always, in every season, in every place, to the poor and to the rich, to servants and to masters, to subjects and to kings. He is not repelled by the poverty of some, nor drawn by the wealth and power of others. He enters hospitals as he enters palaces, the huts of shepherds as the courts of the great.

He is the most generous and the most magnificent of all friends. He comes to you only to do you good. Are you poor? It is to enrich you. Sick? It is to heal you. Afflicted? It is to console you. Persecuted? It is to defend you. Astray and far from the paths of salvation? It is to bring you back to the right way. Weak and failing? It is to sustain and strengthen you. He is your king, but a gentle king, full of kindness and easy access. The kings of the earth have their guards, and one does not approach their sacred persons at will. Ministers have

their days of audience; judges have their appointed times and hours. You alone, O my God, infinitely greater than these kings, these ministers, these judges, receive us, listen to us, converse with us at every hour — dare I say it? — as often as we please: tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your king comes to you, meek. Could it be possible, then, that we should be so ungrateful toward you, so cruel toward ourselves, as not to profit from so easy and so gracious an access? Could it be possible? Alas, it is only too true. What do we see in these holy days? Thirty or forty people scattered in a church, while there are thousands in the streets, in the shops, in places of feasting and amusement. Scarcely do a few good souls, moved by concern for their salvation, come to bear witness, through their devout attendance, to the joy that so gracious a presence gives them, while countless others, preferring their pleasures to their duties,

live without piety, without religion, without love, without gratitude toward this generous benefactor. What ingratitude! What contempt! If I were urging you to receive communion frequently, you might find some excuse to dispense yourselves from it. The respect you would claim to owe this awesome sacrament, your attachment to the world, the state of sin you are in, the purity required for participation in the body of Jesus Christ, the fear of making unworthy communions — these would all serve you as pretexts and reasons. But when I invite you merely to draw near often to these tabernacles where your God, your judge, your savior, your brother — in a word, your Jesus — resides; when I invite you to interrupt your pleasures, and sometimes your business, to answer the ardent desire he has to be with you; when I invite you to come to the foot of these altars, to which his free love has brought him down, in order to listen to your prayers and give you leisure to lay your needs before him; when he himself invites you there, and works wonders to show you his eagerness — what pretexts can you allege to excuse yourselves?

Yield, then, at last, my brothers, to reasons so gentle and so compelling; be moved by the boundless mercies of your God; and if my words do not suffice, listen attentively to the voice, full of tenderness, that this loving child causes to resound in your heart today from the midst of your altars: come to me, all you who labor and are burdened. Come to me, he says, all you who groan beneath the weight of labor and sorrow, and I will give you rest. Come, come, fear nothing; I dim the splendor of my glory to spare the weakness of your sight. I present myself under the lovable form of a child, the better to draw you to me. Come, you above all who are gathered in this church. It is for you; it is especially for your sake, in preference to so many others, that I have chosen this temple in which to display the charms of my love and make it the throne of my mercies: he has not done thus for every nation. Will you say, my brothers, that it is your respect for his presence that keeps you away? A false pretext. Will it not, rather, be giving him excellent proof of that respect, when you say to him with the centurion: I am not worthy, O my God, that you should come under my roof; but since, wretched as I am, you allow me to present myself before you, since you yourself invite me, I come to prostrate myself at your feet and beg you to have pity on my weakness and my misery. Will you say, further, that it is the fear of receiving communion unworthily, or the evil state in which you find yourself? It would indeed be a horrible sacrilege to receive communion in such a state. But to approach him in order to beg the grace of leaving that state — will this not be, on the contrary, a most pleasing prayer to him? I am a sinner, you will say to him; but you are my Jesus. I cannot receive you into a soul that is defiled. But, adorable Jesus, who died for my sins, give me a contrite heart, that I may no longer be unworthy to partake of your holy mysteries. Such, my brothers, ought to be your occupations, your feelings, your thoughts in these holy days. These are days of glory for Jesus Christ, days of propitiation and pardon for you. This august sacrament is the worthy object of your veneration and the true source

of your graces. The divine Jesus is there, as it were, upon the throne of his glory: humble yourselves, then, and abase yourselves before him. He is there, as it were, upon the throne of his mercies: love him, then, rejoice, and come assiduously to gather his favors and thank him for his goodness. Say to him what the chaste bride of the Canticle once said: "I hold you, my beloved, and I will not let you go — or, if I do let you go, it will only be after you have given me your blessing, that I may pass from this life of darkness into that great day of your glory, when you shall show yourself openly and without veil to your chosen." Amen.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A GOOD COMMUNION

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

(John 6.)

The Son of God, my brothers, became man in order to make us gods, says Saint Augustine; and this divinization, which constitutes the happiness of all the predestined, is the fairest masterpiece of religion, the greatest design of God, and the noblest aspiration of the human heart. It is the fairest masterpiece of religion, because all its power tends to transform us into God. It is the noblest aspiration of the human heart, because man, poor yet noble by nature, always wishes to rise and advance in goodness, in peace, in honor, until he is fully satisfied; and since he is capable of possessing God, he cannot be satisfied unless he rises to God and is filled with God. It is the greatest design of God. A workman as excellent as God can have no other design, in working outside himself, than to produce a perfect work, as he himself is perfect. Now, he can make it perfect only by uniting it to himself, since he alone is the being who is supremely and essentially perfect, and who gives perfection to all things. Thus, to make man perfect, God must draw him, raise him, unite him to his own goodness, deify him, and transform him into himself through the attractions of his grace and his glory. But since God and man are two extremes infinitely distant from one another, it is necessary, in order to unite them, that each should draw near the other. God must descend, and man must ascend; God must begin the union, and man must complete it; God must stoop toward man, and man must rise toward God. The first took

place in the Incarnation; the second takes place in a good communion: he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Man, in a good communion, is raised to the most glorious state and the most perfect happiness he can aspire to in this life. He is united to Jesus Christ in a manner beyond words; he lives the very life of Jesus Christ, and this is his incomparable glory. Being one with Jesus Christ, he acts through the powers of Jesus Christ, and this constitutes his supreme happiness. The honor and the benefit of a good communion — this, my brothers, is the entire subject of this discourse and of your attention. Hail, Mary.

First Point

I distinguish, first of all, two kinds of union: moral union — or, if you will, union of heart and mind — and physical, real union, such as that which took place in the Incarnation. A good communion accomplishes the first absolutely; and, in the judgment of the Fathers and theologians, it partakes in some measure of the second as well. You shall judge of this by what I am about to tell you.

Grace is a participation in the divine nature; divinity is life by its very essence, so that a man clothed in this grace may truly boast that he is raised to the dignity of a child of God. He is united to God most closely; he is, in a sense, deified, and he lives by the very life of God. This is what led Saint Paul to say: I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me — it is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me. And since all the sacraments are instituted to communicate this grace to us, it is equally true to say that they all unite us to God, that they all cause us to live by the life of God, and that a soul, having received them in holiness, may say with the Apostle: I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.

However incontestable this truth may be, we must nevertheless admit, my brothers, that this great work finds its consummation only in the adorable mystery of our altars; that this elevation of the soul is carried to its highest point only through the sacrament of the Eucharist; that this divine life and this intimate union with God attain their perfection only through a devout communion. In the other sacraments, we receive grace, it is true; but in the sacrament of the altar, we receive the very author of grace. In the other sacraments, we share in the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ; in the Eucharist, it is the very body and blood of Jesus Christ that are given to us. There, it is weak elements that confer grace; here, it is Jesus Christ himself who produces it directly. There, he gives grace in part; here, in fullness. There, the streams; here, the source. There, the fruits; here, the tree that bears them. There, the gifts; here, the giver of every gift. Let us say more, my brothers, and let us not confine the whole elevation of man in communion to this simple moral union that he contracts with God through sanctifying grace. Just as, in the Incarnation, the Word united himself to our nature by a bond so close and so intimate that it made but one person with him, so I venture to say that, in proportion as the divine Eucharist operates within all the faithful who receive it worthily, it produces so close a union of their bodies and souls with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ that they are, with him, but one body, as Saint Chrysostom says; but one Christ, according to Saint Augustine; but one God, according to Saint Chrysologus.

It is true, and I ought not to conceal it, that, strictly speaking, this is not properly a physical union of man with God, as in the Incarnation. But it is more than a union of mind and heart founded upon sanctifying grace, though this favor alone, were it the only one, would still be beyond compare. It is, I say, something more; and the Fathers, speaking of this ineffable and deifying union that we contract with God in a devout communion, raise us far higher still. They tell us that in devoutly receiving the divine mysteries, we do not

merely bear the Son of God within us, but we become one body with him. O man, cries Saint Chrysostom, consider the honor you receive at the table to which you are admitted! That which makes the angels tremble with holy awe, which they scarcely dare look upon because of the splendor that surrounds it — this very thing is our food; it is to this that we are united, and it is through this that we become one body and one flesh with Jesus Christ. They conclude from this that, being members of Jesus Christ, and forming with him, according to the Apostle, but one body, we are all, in consequence, Jesus Christ. Do you understand this, my brothers? says Saint Augustine; do you grasp it fully? If this is so, marvel at the grace God shows us, and leap for joy; we are all Jesus Christ. They go further still, and conclude that, being all Jesus Christ, we are God himself; that it is for this reason he became man, in order to raise man to divinity. He bears man, says Saint Chrysologus, so that man may fall no more; he makes heavenly one whom he had formed from the dust of the earth; he quickens with the divine spirit one whom he had animated with the human spirit, and he raises him to God in such a way that he removes from him all that belongs to sin, to death, to toil, to sorrow, and to the dust of mortality.

But what, in the end, is this ineffable union? In what manner is it accomplished? Here you stop me, my brothers; my understanding is too weak. I can only answer you, with my angelic doctor, that it is a most sacred secret known only to the eyes of faith; or with Saint Augustine, that it is a mystery of unity which God has consecrated at the table of angels, content to let us taste its effects without granting us knowledge of it. Elevated by the sublimity of their genius, enlightened by a living faith, filled with the depths of this mystery, the holy Fathers have tried to help us understand it through comparisons that we must respect, but which fall far short of reaching the true height of the thing itself. Nevertheless, this will not prevent me from recalling a few of them to you, so that the very difficulty of comprehending our infinite

elevation may make us prize it all the more. Saint Cyril makes use of the comparison of two melted waxes that blend together and form but one body. Thus, says this Father, he who receives the body and blood of Jesus Christ is united to him so closely that Jesus Christ is found within him, and he himself, in turn, within Jesus Christ, according to these words of Jesus Christ himself: he who eats my flesh remains in me, and I in him. I revere the thought of this great man, but it remains a mystery to me; I do not comprehend it.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, following Saint Augustine, explains it by the intimate union of food with the one who eats it. In every other gift the Savior has made of himself, says this holy doctor, some separation always remains between him and mankind. He gave himself in his birth as the companion of our earthly journey; in his life, as the help of our necessities; in his death, as the price of our redemption. But, once again, in all these unions some kind of separation always remained. In communion, he gives himself as food; no separation remains; there is a perfect and intimate union between Jesus Christ and the Christian who receives communion worthily. Indeed, of all the unions nature can produce, none is more intimate than that which occurs between the body of man and the food he takes. The meat we eat does not merely enter our stomachs. After digestion, it passes into the very depths of our being; it blends with the most hidden parts of ourselves; it becomes one with us, and, as Saint Thomas says, it is united in the unity of a single body. But here there is this difference: material bread is changed into the substance of the one who eats it, whereas the heavenly bread, on the contrary, changes into itself the one who eats it, and transforms him by its power: you shall not change me into yourself as you would change ordinary food into your flesh; rather, you shall be changed into me.

This hidden power fills me with wonder, though it grants me no clear understanding of it. It ravishes my heart; it dazzles my mind. I believe it, but I

do not comprehend it; and all I can do is cry out, with Saint Cyril, in the faith I hold of this truth: O the great glory of the Christian! O the great love of God! Through participation in these divine mysteries, however this may come about, you are no longer anything but one flesh and one blood with Jesus Christ. Grant me, then, O my God, that, forgetting for a moment what you are and what I am, your greatness and my lowliness, I give my heart and my voice the freedom to cry out with one of your devoted servants: You are, Lord, not only my God, my creator, my redeemer, my judge, my king, and my father, but my very substance — this is how Paschasius, abbot of Corbie, addressed him — and it is in this, great God, that you treat us with greater honor than the Jews. You permitted the people of the Old Testament to call you the noblest portion of their inheritance. But the Christian, under the law of grace, nourished by your body and your blood, has the right to call you his substance. Let Abraham call you his reward, let Isaac call you the God of his fathers, let Moses call you his sovereign good, let Solomon call you his wisdom; for my part, I say more than these patriarchs and these kings, since I have the right to call you my substance.

O sacrament of devotion, said the great Saint Augustine in the fullness of his joy, O sign of unity, O bond of charity, whoever wishes to live will find here the very principle of life. Let him draw near, let him believe, let him eat, let him incorporate Jesus Christ into himself, and he shall be made one with Jesus Christ; he shall live the life of Jesus Christ. We all love greatness, and this natural desire for honor, which grows with age, becomes our torment because it finds nothing to satisfy it. Do you wish, my brothers, to give full satisfaction to your ambition? Draw near to the Son of God through a devout communion. Come to me, he says, all you who groan beneath the weight of labor and sorrow, and I will give you rest. You pursue honors; come to me, and I will fill you with glory. You wish to be great: come to me, and I will make gods of you: come to me, all of you. But come to me as I have come to you. This, my

brothers, is the path by which we must ascend to God in communion. It is the very path by which God descended to you in the Incarnation. Approach the holy table, then, with a desire to conform yourselves wholly to the incarnate Word; consider how much purity, humility, charity, and holiness you owe to him in order to unite yourselves to the model of every virtue, and to profit from the great benefits that flow from this divine union.

Second Point

That a soul, through communion, receives new strength to resist temptation and sin; that Jesus Christ, in her heart, softens every bitterness and fills her with ineffable sweetness and joy; that he perfects every virtue within her; that he kindles there the purest flames and the holiest ardors of charity — most holy loves and immaculate desires, as William of Paris puts it; that he weakens the fire of concupiscence, restrains the passions, and checks the impulses of nature; that he blots out even venial sin, remits the penalty of sin; that he is a sure pledge of the resurrection, a seed of immortality and glory; in a word, that he becomes for the soul a source of every good and a remedy for every evil — this is what Scripture teaches us, what the Fathers instruct us in, what reason proves to us, what experience makes evident to us, and what you yourselves may conclude from what I have already said. I would exceed the bounds I have set myself were I to examine all these advantages in detail. But here is one on which I shall dwell, and which deserves your full attention. It arises naturally from that sacred union of the soul with Jesus Christ of which I spoke to you in my first point.

I say, then, that a Christian who receives communion worthily acts through the powers of Jesus Christ, and thereby finds himself able to discharge all the debts he owes to God and to his neighbor; and this constitutes his great happiness on earth. To grasp this, observe, if you please, my brothers, that we

are born under four obligations, from which it seems as impossible to free ourselves as it is to escape them. By the laws of our spiritual and divine soul, we are bound to relieve the wretched. Since we are their brothers according to the flesh, and since we bear within our souls the living image of the same God who formed us, we find within our hearts a law engraved by nature, obliging us to show them compassion and to stretch out our hand to relieve them. This is our first obligation. The second is to make satisfaction for all our sins before the divine majesty. We are born sinners, we live as sinners, we sin at nearly every moment of our lives, and there is no sin of ours, however slight, for which we do not owe satisfaction to the divine justice we have offended.

The third is to acknowledge each benefit and each favor we have received from God; and finally, the fourth is to love each of his perfections, and to love it as much as it deserves to be loved. It is for this that we live, and that we have a heart at all: on these commandments hang the whole law and the prophets.

What ought to alarm us is the multitude of the wretched and of miseries we find in this world, the multitude of sins we have committed and continue to commit every day, the multitude of graces God has bestowed on us, and finally the multitude of his greatnesses and perfections that we are bound to love and adore. These are the four multitudes that ought to make us say with David: I have not known the numbers — I do not know these numbers; these infinite multitudes infinitely surpass my understanding. What means have I of reaching them, what means of discharging these debts whose number is unknown to me? We can do it, my brothers, by following David and doing as he says. I do not know the number of my obligations. Nevertheless, by a miraculous help of the mercy of my God, I shall discharge them perfectly, and I shall do so by entering into the power of the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ, our redeemer and our master, possesses four powers by which he has done

everything, and by which he will do whatever remains for us to do in order to discharge our debt to his Father: his voice, his wounds, his goodness, and his heart. His voice, which created the world and made it the principle of nature and of life. His wounds, which redeemed the world, destroyed death and sin, and made him the principle of resurrection, salvation, and grace. His countenance, or his divine beauty, by which he worthily rewards all the merits of angels and saints, and which has made him the principle of glory and of all the joy that shall exist eternally in paradise. And, finally, his heart, by which he brings forth the Holy Spirit and the love that makes him the principle of eternity, and which is the consummation of all the blessedness of God the Father.

All this being supposed, remember now, my brothers, what I said in my first point: that, according to the language of Scripture and the Fathers, to receive communion worthily is to be intimately united to Jesus Christ, to clothe oneself with the very person of Jesus Christ, to live his life; it is to enter into all his powers and to act only through them and with them.

In that blessed moment, then, when we possess the sacred host, it is with the voice of Jesus Christ that we speak and pray to God for the wretched of this world and for all those we love and who love us. It is not merely in the name of this loving Savior that we ask for graces; it is, I say, through his own voice and his own word. For just as our hand, clothed in a glove, touches nothing and does nothing except through that glove, so too, during our communions, our voice enters into the voice of the Son of God and speaks only through it; and since his power is infinite, we have then the means to satisfy

not only our duties of friendship toward our relatives and benefactors, but also our obligations of charity toward all the wretched. We do enough to merit and obtain as much consolation as anyone could desire, in every corner of the

earth where there are people who suffer and weep, since it is a God who speaks and prays for them together with us.

It is likewise through the very wounds of this same crucified God that we repair our faults and satisfy his justice. During communion we enter into these wounds; they become ours; God the Father sees them upon us, and it is the satisfaction we present against his wrath. Look, O God, look, great God, we may say to him, look upon the satisfaction I offer you. It is infinite. These are the wounds of your Son. Today they are mine. They are within me, they are mine; I possess them, and I present them to you.

Thus, the gratitude we present to his mercy is something that pleases him infinitely, and is worth as much as the very blessings he has given us. It is the beauty, it is the countenance, it is the very person of his Son that dwells within us, and that we give back to him by giving ourselves, and by making ourselves his sacrifice.

Finally, since our great obligation is to love him, and since his laws, his prophets, and his evangelists ask nothing of us on his behalf but love, can we do better than enter into the heart of Jesus, join and unite ourselves to his love, and then appear

in this state before the eyes of his Father, and say to him: Look, O God, great God, look and see the love I offer you. And should he say: this love is not yours — it is true, Lord; but it now dwells within me. It is mine, I dispose of it, I offer it to you; and if this infinite love pleases you infinitely, what can you find to reproach in this little creature who has given it to you? Why do you speak to it of its weaknesses?

After this, judge, my brothers, whether it is possible for a mortal man to be in a state more divine and more advantageous than the one we enjoy when, in a communion accompanied by the proper dispositions, our soul, according to

the words of the prophet, like a bride on her wedding day, clothed and magnificently adorned with all the beauties of Jesus Christ, appears before God and before the angels.

It is true that beneath all this we still bear our infirmities and our miseries. But they are covered, as the deformities of our face would be covered were it possible to clothe it in the rays and beauty of the sun. Its light, poured out everywhere, would penetrate them and render them invisible. So too, when on these feast days we are clothed in our heavenly garment, the splendors and infinite beauties of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ penetrate, without being sullied, all the imperfections that remain in our soul. The angels then see in us nothing but purity, holiness, and grace.

Do not doubt it, my brothers: covered, like Jacob, in the fragrant garment of our elder brother, we may say to the eternal Father: My Father, behold, I bring you

the gift that pleases your heart infinitely and that you have every right to expect from me. Confess, then, that I am your beloved son, and that you owe me your blessing and your inheritance. And he, in turn, has every reason to answer you as Isaac answered Jacob, opening his bosom to you and embracing you tenderly: behold, the smell of my son. Yes, my dear child, from your garment there rises a fragrance and a perfume that delight me, and that compel me to do all that you desire and hope from my goodness: behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field which the Lord has blessed.

Judge, then, my brothers, whether it is possible to conceive of a state more sublime and more advantageous than that of the Christian who receives communion worthily. I say worthily, I say devoutly, I say in holiness, with all the required dispositions. For do not suppose that every communion always

produces the same effects. God, in the order of grace as in the order of nature, communicates himself according to the dispositions he finds in those who receive him. It is everywhere the same Jesus Christ that one receives, it is true; but he communicates himself, unites himself, and acts more or less according to the greater or lesser disposition he finds.

Lord, who then shall they be who, on these feast days, shall enter your tabernacle; who, raised upon your holy mountain, shall share in the divine honors and the great benefits you prepare in the paschal communion? Lord, who shall dwell in your tabernacle, or who shall rest upon your holy mountain?

Shall it be you, undevout Christians, who approach our altars stained with a thousand venial sins that you commit freely and have no wish to renounce, who succumb beneath the weight of so many evil habits that tyrannize you and that you continue to nourish? No — these, says Saint Thomas, are just so many thick clouds that will prevent the sun of justice from shedding its light upon you.

Shall it be you, souls of flesh and blood, who seek nothing but amusements, comforts, ease, pleasures, and human consolations? Ah, Jesus Christ is a bridegroom of blood who dwells only among the thorns of mortification.

Shall it be you, worldly women and girls, who bring to the holy table all the pomp, luxury, and vanity of the world, who come to a God poor, humble, and modest, decked and arrayed like actresses; who dare receive a God of purity into a body that breathes nothing but softness, and which, through its scandalous exposure, spreads corruption and impurity everywhere? Ah, how I fear, on the contrary, that, were you guilty of but this single fault, instead of receiving a sentence of life you might receive a sentence of death, and that,

instead of being united to Jesus Christ, you might be separated from him for eternity.

Shall it be you, habitual libertines, who, having spent an entire year in dissipation, excess, debauchery, and licentiousness, put off until the very day of communion any thought of it, who wait for the solemnity of Easter to prepare yourselves;

who believe you have fulfilled your duty because you took a few moments to collect yourselves, who come hastily and in the crowd to accuse yourselves of your disorders, and immediately afterward present yourselves at the holy table; who confuse the exercises of penance with communion, and who receive communion often without ever having performed any exercise of penance? Ah, Christians, this is an indignity; and whoever acts in this manner, far from deserving blessings, draws down instead the curse with which Saint Paul threatens those who eat this divine food without discernment.

Shall it be you, mercenary and inconstant spouses, fickle brides who follow the bridegroom only for the fragrance of his perfumes, who accompany him only through gardens strewn with roses and lilies, and who abandon him upon the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense; who run to him while a gentle breeze bears you along to rest quietly in his shade, but who leave him the moment a contrary wind arises; who seek him out at last and receive him into your homes more to satisfy yourselves than to please him, more for his gifts and his consolations than for himself? Do you think that a love so impure, so self-serving, can render you worthy of the chaste embraces of the bridegroom, who wishes to be loved and sought for his own sake alone?

Shall it be you, finally, lukewarm and slothful Christians, who approach our holy mysteries out of custom, out of pretense, out of mere ceremony, with

indifference and languor? No. This heavenly bread, says Saint Augustine, demands a hungry heart.

Who, then, once again, Lord, shall be worthy of the honor, of the benefits, of communion? I have already told you, my brothers: it is he who goes to Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ came to him; he who eats him with a desire to conform himself to this model of every virtue. It will be he who presents a heart free of stain and adorned with righteousness. It will be he who, withdrawn from dealings with created things, detached in heart from the vanities of the age, gathered into God through prayer and penance, labors earnestly to conquer his passions and root out his evil habits. It will be that righteous soul who, emptied of self and filled with God and his greatness, eats this heavenly bread with a living faith, an ardent charity, and a profound humility. Behold him who shall receive the blessings of the Lord and be filled with the mercies of his God. It is to such a one that Jesus Christ will unite himself intimately through communion, and in whom he will work wonders both for time and for eternity. Amen.

ON THE CRIME AND PUNISHMENT OF SACRILEGIOUS COMMUNION

Whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord... He who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

(1 Corinthians 11.)

Since God, my brothers, is a being of supreme intelligence, from whom nothing can escape the reach of his knowledge and his wisdom, there is nothing so hidden in the depths of a soul that he does not uncover it. Thoughts, affections, desires, impulses, inclinations — all lie so fully exposed before his eyes that no human cunning is subtle enough to conceal from him the least fault. You may lie to God, says Saint Augustine, but you cannot deceive him. He knows all that you do, he sees all your works, he knows all your intentions. Ah, my brothers, with what sentiments of humility and fear would we not approach the holy table, were we firmly persuaded that this great God enters, through communion, into our very conscience, there to observe and examine the dispositions of our hearts, to judge us and to condemn us, should they prove

defective! Where is the hypocrite who does not tremble at the foot of the holy altar? Where is the false devotee who is not seized with dread at the moment of communion, if he believes that, by receiving communion in a state of mortal sin, he is about to receive his judge and eat his own judgment, as the Apostle says?

Since knowledge of this truth is of the utmost importance for the salvation of the faithful, and for the respect owed to this divine sacrament, allow me, my brothers, entering into the sentiments of Saint Paul, to bring unworthy

communions to trial. To do this, I must accomplish two things: establish the fact and pronounce the sentence — that is, set forth the circumstances of the crime and condemn the criminal. You shall see, then, first, the crime of a sacrilegious communion in all its circumstances; you shall see, next, the fearful judgments pronounced against those who are guilty of it. In a word, the enormity and the punishment of an unworthy communion — this, my brothers, is the whole matter of this discourse and the object of your attention.

But, Lord, that my judgment may proceed from your own presence, and that I may be a worthy interpreter of the truths you teach us through your Apostle, sustain my voice, enlighten my mind, kindle my heart with the purest zeal for your glory. I ask these graces through the intercession of Mary: Hail, Mary.

First Point

That the Gentiles worshipped idols, to the detriment of the honor due to the Godhead alone, their idolatry might be excused, in part, by their

blindness. That the Jews so often abandoned the religion of their fathers to follow the superstitions of the Persians and the Egyptians, one may excuse their errors by the misfortune of the times, by the length of their captivity, and by the necessity of the dealings they were forced to maintain with these unbelieving nations. But that Christians — born within the bosom of the Church, raised in the cradle of the true religion, enlightened by the light of faith, instructed in the maxims of the Gospel, persuaded of the holiness of our mysteries, regenerated by the waters of baptism, sanctified by grace, heirs of eternal life; that Christians, I say, who have been drawn out of the darkness of the Gentiles, set in the place of the Jews' unbelief, declared adopted children of God — should declare themselves the enemies of God himself, attack him in his own person, insult him within his own house, dishonor him in all that is most august in his mysteries, in all that is most sacred in religion — this is

what the prophet calls things so horrible that one can scarcely bring oneself to think or speak of them. This is the crime of all sinful Christians, but above all of those who receive communion unworthily. Against these monsters of Christendom, we would need thunderbolts rather than words, calamities rather than threats; and my own expressions are too feeble to portray the enormity of their crime.

Speak, then, yourself, great Apostle; instruct my listeners; make known to them the nature and the malice of an unworthy communion. Listen to him, my brothers; it is in the eleventh chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians that he explains it. As often, he says, as you eat the body of Jesus Christ

and drink his blood, you proclaim the death of the Lord. Therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This, then, is the whole enormity of an unworthy communion: to make oneself guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. But how is this so? First, because one unites the body of a pure God to flesh corrupted by sin; second, says Saint Augustine, because one attacks this God-Man directly, personally, and immediately, crucifying him afresh and putting him to death, so far as this is possible for him in his state of immortality. This is how one becomes guilty of this adorable body and blood. Let us explain these truths.

To understand this monstrous union which a sinner forms between his own impure flesh and the body of Jesus Christ, compare the holiness of God with the corruption of a soul in which sin dwells. The God we receive in communion is so holy that, had he consulted only himself, he would never have communicated himself to any creature, however perfect he might have made it. He is no less jealous of his holiness than of his glory and his other perfections, and Scripture tells us that he willed that whatever he had once sanctified should always be treated with reverence. If he made his name

known to the people of Israel, he forbade at the same time that it be spoken carelessly, because he is holy and terrible. If he appeared in a burning bush, the ground around it became holy, and Moses could no longer walk upon it without removing his sandals. If he gave his law on Sinai, thunder and lightning forbade any approach. If he covered the tabernacle and the sanctuary of the temple, the sons of Aaron alone were permitted to draw near it; and the unfortunate Uzzah saw the single indiscretion of an overzealous care punished in his own person, for having laid a rash hand upon the ark he had no right to steady. Everywhere the Lord demands the respect and veneration of his people; everywhere what is set apart for his service is separated from what serves profane uses; everywhere he teaches men that he is terrible in his holiness.

Now, what does a Christian do who receives communion unworthily? Not only does the unworthy communicant sin against this holy God, but he forms a monstrous alliance between his impure flesh and the flesh of this God of holiness. Not only does he defile the body of this spotless Lamb, but he forces it to dwell amid his own impurities. Not only does he dishonor the Holy of Holies, but he compels him to remain in the midst of corruption. What am I saying? He makes him, in effect, a member of a harlot's body — forgive me this expression; it is the Apostle's own. Understand his meaning, my brothers. The body of a Christian, through communion, becomes the body of Jesus Christ; or, if you will, the body of Jesus Christ, through communion, passes into the body of a Christian, and the two become but one body. Now, the body of a sinful Christian is a corrupted body; it is a

sink of infection and decay; and by attaching itself to created things, above all through impurity, it becomes the body of a harlot. Thus, by a consequence that makes one shudder, but which the Apostle himself dared to state, the adorable body of Jesus Christ becomes a corrupted body, a rotten and tainted body; it

becomes the body of a vindictive man, of a thief, of an adulterer, of a harlot. What indignation would you not feel against a wretch who poured corrupted blood into the very chalice in which the priest had placed the blood of Jesus Christ? This fills you with horror, my brothers, and I myself shudder at it. But tell me, in the end — do you think yourselves any less guilty, you sacrilegious Christians? The wretch who did what I have described, and what I dare not repeat, would merely be mixing impurity with purity; that alone would be his crime. And you — what do you do, when you receive the body of Jesus Christ in a state of mortal sin? Do you not likewise mix purity with impurity? Do you not pour, into one and the same heart, the adorable blood of Jesus Christ together with the blood of your own idol — the object of your passions? Do you not join a virginal flesh to a flesh corrupted and decayed? Do you not, in the end, make it a member of a prostituted body? But it is not only through this monstrous union that you make yourselves guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; it is also because you attack this God-Man directly and personally.

It is not mere creatures that are offended in an unworthy communion: it is the Creator himself. It is not distant persons that are insulted; it is a present God, a God intimately united to you through the eucharistic species. Every time one sins, one violates the law, says Saint Cyprian. But every time one receives communion unworthily, one insults the very author and lawgiver of that law. Every time one sins, one despises the authority of God. But every time one receives communion unworthily, one tramples underfoot the body and blood of a God; one crucifies him afresh, as the Apostle says.

Indeed, if it is true that the sacrifice of our altars is not so merely figurative of that of the cross as not to be itself real — for, as the Council of Trent teaches, it is the very same victim who is offered — it is equally true that the sinner who approaches it unworthily renews the death and passion that Jesus Christ

suffered on Calvary, and crucifies him anew. And if it is likewise true that the body of Jesus Christ is not merely spirit and life in itself, but also a life-giving principle for others, it is equally true that whoever receives it unworthily stifles its spirit, nullifies its virtue, and inflicts upon it a second death crueler than the one it suffered on Calvary, accompanied by circumstances far more painful; so that a Christian who receives communion unworthily makes himself guilty of all the crimes of the Jews — the crime of Judas, of Caiaphas, of Herod, of Pilate, and of all the executioners who crucified this loving Savior.

He is guilty of the treachery of Judas, since he betrays his divine Master with a sacrilegious kiss. He is guilty of the crime of the Pharisees, since he persecutes him in his own person and in his sacramental life, just as they persecuted him in his mortal life. He is guilty of the crime of Caiaphas, since he believes, like that blind high priest, that it is necessary to put Jesus Christ to death in order to let his own passions live. He is guilty of the crime of Herod, since, having received Jesus Christ into a criminal conscience, he heaps reproach and contempt upon him, just as that proud prince did after receiving him at his court. He is guilty of the crime of Pilate. That unjust judge handed the Lamb over to the fury of wolves — that is, to the mercy of his enemies; and a Christian who receives communion unworthily delivers him over to the fury of his own disordered passions, to his hatred, his vengeance, his greed, his impurity, his cruelty, and even to the devil, his chief enemy. I shudder to say it, my brothers, but it is only too true. A sinner is spiritually possessed by the devil. This prince of darkness dwells in his heart as upon his throne. There he is worshipped; there he reigns as sovereign. What, then, does a sinner do who receives Jesus Christ into that very heart through communion? Does he not deliver him over to the fury of this tyrant? Does he not place him beneath his feet? Does he not expose him to his rage, his insults, and his contempt? Does he not give this arrogant enemy the

satisfaction of finding himself face to face with Jesus Christ, and of reproaching him that he himself is more faithfully served and adored by Christians than he, though he has never done anything for them? He is guilty of the treachery of Judas, since he betrays his divine Master with a sacrilegious kiss. He is guilty of the crime of the Pharisees, since he persecutes Christ in his own person and in his sacramental life, just as they once persecuted him in his mortal life. He is guilty of the crime of Caiaphas, since he believes, like that blind high priest, that Jesus Christ must be put to death so that his own passions may live on. He is guilty of the crime of Herod, since, having received Jesus Christ into a criminal conscience, he heaps upon him reproach and contempt, just as that proud prince did after receiving him at his court. He is guilty of the crime of Pilate. That unjust judge abandoned this Lamb to the fury of wolves—that is, to the mercy of his enemies—and a Christian who communicates unworthily delivers him over to the fury of his own disordered passions: to his hatred, his vengeance, his avarice, his impurity, his cruelty, and to the devil himself, his chief enemy. I shudder to say it, my brothers, but it is only too true. A sinner is spiritually possessed by the devil. This prince of darkness dwells in his heart as upon a throne. There he is worshipped; there he reigns as sovereign. What, then, does a sinner do who receives Jesus Christ, through communion, into that very heart? Does he not deliver him to the fury of this tyrant? Does he not trample him underfoot? Does he not expose him to this tyrant's rage, insults, and contempt? Does he not grant this arrogant enemy the satisfaction of standing face to face with Jesus Christ, and of taunting him that he himself is served and worshipped by Christians more faithfully than Christ ever was, though Christ has done everything for them and he has done nothing?

Finally, this unworthy Christian shares the guilt of the abominable cruelty of the executioners who crucified and put to death the God-Man, since he attacks him, as they did, in his own body; since he stifles his spirit and destroys his

virtue, and would a thousand times take away his natural life, were he not now beyond suffering and immortal—crucifying the Son of God afresh, and holding him up to open contempt. What an outrage! What a deicide! What horrors are contained within the single crime of an unworthy communion! "Oh, how many wicked deeds are committed in this one act!" as Saint Ambrose exclaims.

Is it possible, O my God—can one behold without horror a Christian who joins in a single design with the enemies of Jesus Christ, who enters into fellowship with his executioners; who slays the one who gives himself as food; who crucifies the one who delivered himself wholly for his salvation; who insults the God of glory, and renews, through a wicked communion, the bloody crime of Calvary, with circumstances a thousand times more dreadful?

On the cross, Jesus Christ died more through love and obedience than through the fury of his executioners. From all eternity his Father had resolved upon this death, to satisfy his justice. The Son submitted to it in time, in obedience to his Father's will and to satisfy the love that burned within him for mankind.

But in this invisible death which Christians make him suffer through their sacrilegious communions, there is neither will in the Father who resolved it, nor obedience in the Son who accepts it, nor love in either one desiring it. It is the work of the pure malice of Christians alone.

Moreover, the crime of those who fastened Jesus Christ to the cross was at least of some benefit to mankind. They crucified a God whose death wrought our redemption. They slew a lamb whose blood washed away our stains. They put a just man to death, and death itself was thereby conquered. They opened a side from which salvation poured out upon every nation. They pierced hands and feet from which a thousand graces flowed down upon men. The cross, once a mark of shame, in time became a mark of honor, and has come to be

gloriously revered in every kingdom of the world; and it was, says the Apostle, in view of these very benefits that Jesus Christ gladly gave himself up to death on the cross, despising its shame—enduring the cross for the joy set before him, and counting its shame as nothing.

But when an unworthy communion crucifies Jesus Christ, what good can come of it to soften his suffering? What results from this cruel outrage but the anger of God, the scandal of the Church, public calamity, and the condemnation of sinners?

Finally, those who took part in the Savior's death, who mistreated and crucified him, were not those for whose sake he had worked miracles. They were a blind rabble who did not know him as the Son of God; and had they known him, says the Apostle, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.

But a Christian who crucifies him in his heart through a sacrilegious communion knows, by the light of faith, that this is his God, his creator, his judge, his Jesus, his savior, his supreme benefactor, from whom he has received a thousand graces and a thousand favors. He knows this, and, despite this knowledge and these boundless obligations, he betrays him as Judas did, despises him as Herod did, profanes his sacred body as the insolent soldiers did, tramples his adorable blood underfoot, and crucifies him afresh like the executioners—crucifying the Son of God anew, and holding him up to open contempt.

Ah, Lord! You believed that all was accomplished, that nothing more remained for you to suffer; you believed that the malice of men had reached its full measure in your passion, when you cried, "It is finished." "All is now consummated," you said. But alas—allow me to say it—did you truly foresee this, my loving Savior? A thousand new outrages, a thousand fresh insults still

awaited you within the hearts of these sacrilegious communicants. A new Calvary, crueller than the first, was being prepared for you upon our altars, and that cross on which you were once so sorrowfully fastened was only the beginning of your sufferings. There, your death was the fruit of your obedience and a generous act of your love; here, you die reluctantly and by violence, against your own will and against your Father's. There, your death was the salvation of mankind; here, it becomes their judgment and their condemnation. There, the Jews who put you to death did not know you; here, Christians know you well—and crucify you all the same: crucifying the Son of God afresh, and holding him up to open contempt.

Ah, my brothers, I have not said enough in comparing the crime of these unworthy communicants to that of the Jews. I ought to have said that neither the treachery of Judas, nor the contempt of Herod, nor the injustice of Pilate, nor the fury of the Jews, did as much injury to God as does the sin of a Christian who receives communion sacrilegiously. Though the crime of the latter may in itself appear more monstrous, their ignorance, their blindness, and the other circumstances already noted excuse them in part. But here nothing excuses the unworthy communicant. In every respect, absolutely and in truth, he is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

There, unless I am mistaken, is the case fully examined and the crime fully detailed. It remains now to pronounce sentence upon the criminal.

SECOND PART

If it is true that punishment must be proportioned to the crime, we would find it hard to devise one for the horrible offense, the unparalleled crime we have just described, had not the Apostle himself, after giving us an understanding of the sin, pronounced its sentence. Whoever communicates unworthily, he says, becomes guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. There is his crime, as

you have seen. He eats and drinks his own condemnation, the Apostle adds. There is his sentence.

But what does this judgment contain, and to what punishments does this sentence condemn the criminal? To the loss of everything he possesses of life—spiritual life and natural life alike. It is a sentence of death. If a person, says the great Apostle, convicted by two or three witnesses of having violated the law of Moses, is put to death without mercy, what punishment does he not deserve who tramples the Son of God underfoot, and counts as unclean the blood of the covenant that sanctified him? How much more severe a punishment, do you suppose, is deserved by one who has trodden the Son of God underfoot and treated as profane the blood by which he was made holy!

Jesus Christ is the source, the author, and the master of both life and death; and just as he often restores health and life to those who receive him worthily, he is just as often a source of death to those who receive him unworthily: death to the wicked, life to the good.

Do not doubt it, my brothers: public calamities, sicknesses, wasting illnesses, and sudden deaths are only too often the blows of divine justice, provoked by sacrilegious communions.

But speak once more here, great Apostle. Nothing less than a testimony as unimpeachable as yours could convince my hearers of truths they may find hard to believe. Having told the Corinthians that whoever unworthily eats the body of Jesus Christ shares in the guilt of his death, he adds: and this is the true cause of your sicknesses, your wasting illnesses, your untimely deaths, and the misfortunes afflicting your community—for this reason many among you are weak and sick, and not a few have died.

Do you need further proof? Read the Old Testament. Did not the Ark of the Covenant—which was but a foreshadowing of the sacrament of our altars, and

a source of blessing for the Israelites—bring desolation and dreadful calamity upon the lands of the Philistines?

Consult, if you wish, history and the Fathers. Saint Cyprian tells us that when he himself once gave communion to a woman living in mortal sin, she was found strangled at the foot of the altar—as though, instead of receiving the body of Jesus Christ, she had received a sword thrust into her throat. "And she who had deceived the God-Man felt his avenging hand," says this Father.

But above all, open the testament of the new covenant, and see the visible execution of the sentence of death upon the Jews and upon the wretched Judas. No sooner had this traitor eaten the body of Jesus Christ and drunk his blood than he was given over to the fury of the devil, as the very executor of God's justice: after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. He abruptly leaves the company of Jesus Christ, and, having struck his bargain with the Pharisees, goes and hangs himself in despair. His body bursts open in the middle, and all his entrails spill out in horror: falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.

And you, blind and cruel people, you once demanded that the blood of the just man you were about to shed should fall upon you and upon your children, and you did not ask in vain. The desolation of your city, plundered, sacked, and given over to the fury of the Romans; the ruin of your temple consumed by fire; the war, the famine, and the enemy's sword that struck you down without mercy—there is the strange sprinkling of that blood which has fallen back upon you and upon your descendants. One would think that the wounds of Jesus Christ, whom you put to death, still bleed upon your unhappy children, despised, hated, cursed by every nation, wandering over the whole earth, without a homeland, without altars, without laws, without sacraments, and without God. So true is it that sins committed directly against the person of God fall back like so many arrows upon those who are guilty of them, and that

his blood, poured out upon the cross or within a sinful soul through a sacrilegious communion, is a blood of jealousy that brings death upon all who drink it.

But this is only the least part of the punishments that fall upon the unworthy communicant. He is condemned besides to lose the spiritual life of his soul—a misfortune infinitely more disastrous and more to be feared than the most terrible bodily pains.

It is true that every mortal sin robs us of the spiritual life of grace, yet it does not always take from us the hope of recovering it. It belongs to a sacrilegious communion alone to plunge us into this final calamity. And indeed it does; and I may say of those guilty of it what Saint Paul said of apostate Christians—that no further victim remains for the expiation of their sin. When we commit some mortal sin of vengeance, impurity, injustice, or anger, we lose grace, but our salvation is not thereby despaired of. We still have in Jesus Christ an advocate who pleads for us before God, and we find in him a victim who offers himself daily upon our altars in atonement for our sins. But when, through a sacrilegious communion, we have crucified Jesus Christ afresh, insulted our advocate, and slain our victim, where shall we find another advocate to plead our cause, another victim to offer in sacrifice to appease God's justice? None remains: there is no sacrifice left. Thus the prophecy of Daniel is fulfilled upon these unworthy souls, just as it was once fulfilled against the Jews. They have put the Messiah to death; they have brought abomination into the holy place. There remains no more sacrifice, no more offering, scarcely any hope of salvation: Christ shall be put to death, and sacrifice and offering shall cease. What hope, then, can remain to them, asks Saint Jerome? They turn into a crime the very thing that should have been their atonement. They draw their own condemnation from their own sacrifice; and, to return to what Saint Paul said, they eat, they drink, they take their own

judgment into themselves and make it part of their very substance, so that they can scarcely separate this crime from themselves any longer.

Indeed, unworthy communion imprints upon a soul certain marks of reprobation that are almost never erased. Once a soul has descended to the profanation of the body of Jesus Christ, even the most enormous crimes no longer trouble it. A tangle of darkness clouds its understanding. Hardened by an excess of ingratitude, contempt, malice, treachery, and hypocrisy, its heart sets up a dreadful insensibility against every warning it receives, against the good examples before its eyes, and against the very punishments with which it is threatened; and thus almost every path of penance and salvation closes before it. It may perhaps make some effort to climb out of this abyss, but it will almost always fall back in. It will form some feeble resolutions, but will not carry them out. It will take some halting steps toward conversion, but its steps will always falter; and, persevering in this state until death, it will complete its own ruin and bring to pass the full execution of its own sentence.

Do I say too much, my brothers? Does not Judas—wretched Judas—furnish us a sorrowful example of these terrible truths? This faithless disciple recognizes his guilt, but does not atone for his fault. He cries, “I have sinned,” but his confession avails nothing. He repents of having betrayed innocent blood, but his repentance bears no fruit. He dies in final impenitence, and is damned for eternity. Thus had you ordained, O my God, that whoever should approach your table without being clothed in grace would be bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness: bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness outside.

I do not know, my brothers, what you are thinking of yourselves at this moment, nor what you feel about your own communions; but if God has given any force to my words, I am persuaded that, having heard what I have just said, you are filled with the same anxious dread as the apostles, when Jesus

Christ told them that one of them would betray him. In their consternation, they asked him, one after another: “Is it I, Lord? Is it I who am guilty of this sacrilege?”

Far from wishing to check such wholesome feelings, I must tell you, my brothers, quite the contrary—that you have every reason to feel them. For it is a mistake to believe that sacrilegious communions are as rare as people persuade themselves. It is not always necessary, in order to become guilty of one, to approach the holy table in cold blood with a conscience fully aware of mortal sin. If that were the only case, I would grant, as you might, that the number of such sacrileges is not so very great, and I would have the confidence, O my God, to hope I would find none among this congregation. But if we reason according to the rule Saint Paul lays down for us, it takes far less than that to commit a sacrilege. All those, he says, are guilty who receive the body of the Lord without due discernment. Now, Christians who content themselves, as their sole preparation for communion, with a confession made in haste; who do not feel their conscience burdened with mortal sin, only because they have not examined it closely enough, or because they judge their own conduct by the false standards of the flesh and of the world; Christians who believe themselves truly contrite when they feel only a passing sorrow, who have only a fleeting wish to abandon sin when they think they have formed a firm resolve; Christians who restore neither the goods nor the good name of their neighbor when it lies within their power, who do not forgive their enemies from the heart, who have not yet been reconciled with them; Christians who still wallow in their sinful habits, whose hearts remain attached to the objects of their passions, who deliberately remain within the near occasion of sin, who cannot bring themselves to give up a person who has led them into sin a hundred times over—can it be believed that Christians who approach the holy table in such a state exercise, toward the body of the Lord, the proper discernment the Apostle demands, so as not to communicate

sacrilegiously? No, without doubt, my brothers; and yet how many Christians answer to this description? How many, then, who, on these holy feast days, instead of sharing in the glory of the risen Christ, have made themselves guilty of his body and blood, eating and drinking their own condemnation by communicating sacrilegiously?

I will say no more; I leave the rest to your own reflection and to the tears of your penitence, alone able to draw you out of the abyss into which you may perhaps have had the misfortune to fall; and I close by making, for you and for myself, a solemn act of reparation to our divine Savior, so often outraged in the adorable sacrament of the Eucharist.

Great God, dread judge, here I am, in the posture of a criminal, prostrate at the foot of your altars, to offer public reparation for all the crimes that have dishonored your sovereign majesty in this divine sacrament.

Pardon, O adorable Savior of mankind, for all the blasphemies the pagans have hurled against you, for all the outrages heretics have inflicted upon you, for all the abominations sorcerers and magicians have committed against your holy body. Pardon, O God of patience, for every irreverence, every profanation committed within this church, within every church of this city, and within every church throughout the world. Pardon, O loving Jesus, sovereign head of the new law, for the crimes and sacrileges committed by the ministers of your altars in the exercise of their sacred office. Pardon, O adorable blood of Jesus, so often poured into unclean mouths. Pardon, O holy humanity of my Savior, sacred body, virgin flesh, so often given as food to the cruel, the vindictive, adulterers, the unchaste, the greedy, and libertines abandoned to every animal passion.

O King of the ages, immortal and unseen, would that I could offer you satisfactions other than mere words—that I could sacrifice my very life in

atonement for so many sacrilegious profanations! But alas, even were you to hurl your thunder upon my guilty head, neither my blood nor my death could repair the wrong done to your honor. A victim worthy of you is needed; and where is such a victim to be found, if not in yourself? Continue, then, O great high priest, to offer your sacrifice; continue, innocent victim, to pour out your blood. You alone can atone for our crimes and repair the wrongs done to you. Do again upon our altars what you did upon the cross, when you asked pardon for those who had crucified you, so that, instead of receiving our condemnation there, we may find there a wellspring of life for time and for eternity. Amen.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FIGHTING EVIL THOUGHTS

"Why do you think evil in your hearts?"
(Matthew 9.)

The sinner who is always seeking secrecy, and striving to hide from every eye the sight of his crimes—whether because he is ashamed to commit them, or fears punishment once he has—never feels more secure, my brothers, than when he shuts up his malice within his own heart. There he imagines he may sin with impunity; there he indulges passions he would not dare bring into the light, nurses schemes of revenge he would not dare carry out, and pictures to himself pleasures he would not dare claim openly. There he has the audacity to imagine that there is no God, or that God is not to be preferred above the creature. Since he believes himself unseen by anyone, there is nothing so wicked that he does not think he may dwell upon it. But his own malice deceives him; for if the depths of his soul lie hidden from every other creature, they do not lie hidden from God, who sees him and knows him, who pierces his depths, uncovers his disguises, and penetrates his secrets. Of this the Savior of the world gives us a clear proof when, reproaching the Pharisees for the malice of their thoughts, he shows them that he knows the depths of their hearts: "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

I take this occasion, my brothers, to check the license many allow their minds, failing to reckon fully with the crime and the danger contained in the evil thoughts they entertain with pleasure, or reject only half-heartedly. To do this clearly and effectively, I shall consider such thoughts in two respects: first, in the design of our enemy who suggests them; second, in the use the heart makes of them once it receives them. Viewed in these two respects, I maintain that they are instruments of our enemy's most dangerous malice, and that they ought to be the object of our hearts' most careful attention. The subject is an

unusual one, and it will prove useful if, in treating it, I obtain the graces of the Holy Spirit. Let us ask for them through the intercession of Mary.

FIRST PART

Not all our thoughts are born within our own hearts. Some descend into them, and Scripture teaches me that others rise up from within. Holy inspirations and good thoughts are not born in us; they descend upon us. God sends them; heaven is the place of their origin, and it is from there that they come, says Saint Augustine, arriving in us, as a rule, during the night of our afflictions and our needs—like that man in the Gospel who came by night to a friend's house, and was obliged to turn to another, wealthier friend to borrow three loaves of bread—signifying, by all these circumstances, that the holy thoughts which come down from heaven arrive in the night of our need, and move us to have recourse to God for the help of his grace.

Besides these thoughts that descend, there are others that rise up within our hearts. Such were those of the apostles, who imagined they saw a ghost in the risen Jesus Christ—which led this divine Savior to ask them why they were troubled, and why so many differing thoughts were rising up in their hearts: "Why do such thoughts arise in your hearts?" If these thoughts rose up within their hearts, says the admirable Augustine, they no doubt came from somewhere lower than the heart itself; they rose up out of the earth. Such, too, were the thoughts Saint John saw rising from the pit of the abyss, like a thick smoke darkening the sun. The words of the great Augustine confirm this for me. He speaks of evil thoughts as an impure and coarse vapor rising from the mud and mire of the flesh, clouding the mind. Whatever the case, it is certain that they rise up from the depths—whether from hell itself or from concupiscence—and that the devil employs them as the most dangerous instruments of his hatred.

There are no weapons stronger or more dangerous than these thoughts.

There are no weapons stronger. They are, says Saint John Chrysostom, the fiery darts of the evil spirit. These darts fly with great swiftness; they wound before one is even aware of it; there is no heart able to withstand them unless it is clothed in the armor of God that Saint Paul offered the Ephesians—taking up the shield of faith, by which one may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. This same Saint Chrysostom elsewhere likens evil thoughts to enemy troops the devil strives to smuggle into our hearts, which no sooner gain the slightest foothold than they stir up a war a thousand times crueler than any the most barbarous nations could wage upon their neighbors' lands. That is a foreign war; the war our own thoughts wage against us is a civil war within our own household—and is it not plain that civil, domestic wars are always more disastrous than foreign ones?

The devil strives to kindle this domestic war within us, and to succeed he secretly pours in evil thoughts, which stir our passions, inflame our desires, arouse our senses, and turn the whole of man into the tragic theater of a civil war. The devil can accomplish much through the allure of sensible objects that tempt our virtue. But such objects are not always present, and the spiritual death that enters our hearts through the senses cannot enter when those objects are removed. It does not enter through our eyes when we close them to the beauties of this world, and, willingly blind, keep away from places where we might see what it would be dangerous to have seen. It does not enter through our ears when we heed neither the flattery of flatterers nor the talk of the slanderer. There exists a solitude in which one may guard oneself against the sweet violence of a beautiful sight and a seductive voice, and, to overcome such temptations, one need only know how to flee and to live alone. It is not the same with thoughts. They can enter our hearts in any place and at any time. Solitude and secrecy afford us no protection from them, and spiritual

death may always enter along with them. This is why, says Saint Gregory, thoughts are called in Scripture “the gates of death,” signifying that they smooth death’s way into our hearts. The devil uses them, alas, only too often, to carry this fatal death even into the hearts of the holiest men, those who appear most unassailable. He could not conquer this man through the false glitter of honors; the man had refused them generously, or accepted them with restraint. But a proud thought over this very victory crept unnoticed into his mind. At first he gave it too little reflection, and the devil seized upon this to ruin him. This chaste man could not be moved by the sight of a beautiful and dangerous object; he defended himself against its charms and emerged victorious from the struggle—a struggle all the harder to win, since one so often takes pleasure in being conquered by it. Yet he remembers what occurred; and, as though the object he had once spurned were now more charming in his imagination than it had ever appeared to his eyes, he dwells upon the evil he did not commit, and the devil seizes upon this lingering attachment of his mind to lead him into some wicked pleasure, and so bring about his spiritual death.

Perhaps, my brothers, you have never truly reflected upon this important truth. You did not know that an evil thought was one of the most dangerous stratagems of that lion who disguises himself as a fox in order to conquer you once he has deceived you. You regarded it as a useless weed sprung from the fertile soil of your own heart, not knowing it was the tares the devil was sowing while you slept. You looked upon it as an idle diversion of the mind, not knowing it could bring about your spiritual death. But to your misfortune, the devil who wields it knows only too well what it can do. It was while the doorkeeper of Ishbosheth’s palace slept—having dozed off after cleaning grain—that two assassins entered and killed the prince. The doorkeeper of our own heart, my brothers, is prudence, whose true office is to separate the chaff from the good grain—that is, good thoughts from evil ones. Now, no sooner

does the devil notice that this doorkeeper has fallen asleep, letting good and evil thoughts alike pass in indiscriminately, than he seizes the moment to slip in thoughts that deal a deathblow to a careless soul off its guard—well aware, as is written in Isaiah, how easily havoc and desolation may be wrought in a soul occupied with thoughts that are not merely wicked, but even simply useless: their very thoughts are unprofitable; ruin and desolation mark their paths. Would to God, my brothers, that we were persuaded that of all the snares the devil employs for our ruin, none is more dangerous than that of useless or wicked thoughts! You knew this well, great Apostle; you knew its malice and its peril. Indeed, my brothers, in the list of things he defies to separate him from the love of Jesus Christ, he makes no mention of evil thoughts—so convinced was he that they were more dangerous than all the rest, and so deeply had he taken to heart the saying of the Wise Man, who assures us that perverse thoughts cut us off from God. Had we the same conviction, we would regard such thoughts not merely as our enemy's most dangerous weapons, but also as deserving our most careful vigilance and our most earnest concern.

SECOND PART

Our salvation lies so entirely in our own hands, and we are so entirely the masters of our own fate, that, just as God does not save us without our cooperation with his grace, so the devil cannot destroy us without our consent to his suggestions. A moment ago, with Saint Chrysostom, I called evil thoughts the fiery darts of the devil. I must add that every blow he strikes with these weapons is useless unless we ourselves take them up to pierce our own hearts. I mean that the devil may well trouble our imagination with a multitude of thoughts he introduces into it; but, however wicked they may be, they will never make us guilty unless the heart dwells upon them, approves them, takes pleasure in entertaining them—in a word, unless it fails to resist

them promptly and steadfastly. This is why the Wise Man so urgently exhorts men to watch over their hearts with the utmost care: guard your heart above all else. Can one, indeed, watch too carefully over this heart? It is the heart that makes our thoughts good or bad, according to the use it makes of them. It is the source of both life and death, the wellspring of virtue and of sin. Let the devil suggest to it the most wicked thoughts, let him disturb it with the image of the most affecting objects, let him harass it with a million dangerous phantoms—he labors in vain unless the heart labors along with him. The heart alone can make itself guilty. It becomes guilty if it consents to the thoughts the devil inspires, and it will never become guilty if it takes only the trouble to disown them; its own complicity or its refusal determines its guilt or its innocence. In this, my brothers, we resemble the first man, and his misfortune should make us wise. A delightful and beautiful place had been entrusted to his keeping. His enemy—and ours—envied him this happiness, and seduced his companion through cunning counsel. But it still lay within Adam's power to overcome this enemy; he had only to will it. A single refusal would have secured, forever, his own peace and our happiness, and, despite all the devil's fury, would have preserved his felicity and that of all his descendants. He consented freely, and this consent, which ruined him, brought us down along with him. The same thing happens within us, says the great Augustine. In every one of our sins there is a serpent, an Eve, and an Adam: a serpent who tempts, an Eve who is seduced, and an Adam who allows himself to be carried away by his own tenderness toward his wife. The devil still speaks to us, and though he is no longer visible in the hideous shape of a serpent, he never ceases to offer us his counsel unseen. He sometimes seduces our own unhappy Eve—he wins over the lower part of our soul. But if the heart itself does not consent, neither this seducing devil nor this seduced Eve can do it any harm; neither his malice nor her weakness can prejudice it. Both, on the contrary, furnish it the occasion for a glorious victory—whereas, if it consents, if it

heeds the devil's counsel, if it takes any pleasure in it, this poor heart is lost, and, even though no outward act follows, it stands guilty by its very consent. Do not persuade yourselves, then, that only outward acts constitute sin. Since man is made up of two parts, and the mind has its own disorders just as the body has its own excesses, we recognize two kinds of sin—those we call bodily, and those we call spiritual. Reason is the seat and the source of the latter, and it commits them whenever it neglects to reject the very idea of sin, dwells upon it with pleasure, and, without actually wishing to commit the crime, amuses itself by contemplating it. In such a case, says Saint Augustine, without the body being involved at all, without the senses even perceiving it, there exists within us a hidden and invisible offender. Mere consent to an evil thought constitutes the whole of the crime. If thoughts so readily degenerate into sin, was I not right to tell you that they ought to be the object of our hearts' most important concern? With what care ought we not watch over them, seeing what dangerous consequences they may bring! The holy Fathers believed we must do so with such exactness that we should always oppose, with great force, their very entry and their first assaults. They regarded such thoughts as trees and plants bearing death, whose roots must be torn out before they had time to take hold and grow strong. They said we must keep watch over the very head of this serpent, for if its head once slips into our hearts, the rest of its body will easily follow and inflict mortal wounds. We must, they added, stifle these sinful growths of the earth at first light, put out these sparks before they cause a conflagration, dash these children of Babylon against the stone before they grow into men too strong to overcome without great difficulty. They even set before us, as a model of this same exactness, the very conduct of God himself. It is recorded, in the first chapter of Job, that when the devil appeared among the sons of God as they presented themselves before the Lord, God gave him no time to compose himself, and at once demanded to know whence he had come. So too, says Saint Gregory the

Great, if the devil raises up some evil thought amid the good ones the Holy Spirit inspires in us, learn first where it comes from, fix your gaze upon this hidden enemy, and, without giving him time to explain himself, drive him at once from your presence. I know well that he does not always obey, and that once you have driven him out he may return with even greater insistence than before. Should this happen, take care to make of it neither a matter for scruple nor an excuse for your own weakness. Do not make it a matter for scruple. I say this for the sake of timid souls who, unable to distinguish a mere thought from consent to it, or from taking pleasure in it, imagine they commit as many sins as ideas pass through their minds. From this arise their troubled consciences, the difficulties of their confessions, and the anxieties of their minds. I pity souls who suffer such torments; but this is not the place to remedy them. It suffices to tell them that their fear is unreasonable; that there might even be merit in being troubled by such thoughts; that they could carry them their whole lives long without committing a single sin; and that, provided they remain faithful in resisting as often as such thoughts arise, they win as many victories as they fight battles. But what shall we say of those who make of the persistence of such thoughts not a matter of scruple, but an excuse for their own weakness? Ah, how guilty you are, my brothers, when you extend your hand to the enemy who tempts you, when you finally dwell, with pleasure and deliberation, upon the troubling notions he suggests, and when you worship the phantoms and idols he sets up within your own heart! This, says Saint Augustine, is of all forms of idolatry the worst and basest—that of men who worship their own imaginings and offer them sacrifice, making a religion of everything their pride and vanity, and, let us add, their self-love and their aversions, their desires and their fears, set before them amid the wanderings of their minds. I might well level at these imaginative idolaters the same reproach Tertullian directed at the Christian sculptors who fashioned idols for the pagans. Dare you, this Father asked them, dare you lift toward the

eternal Father these hands that are the makers of idols? Dare you touch the body of Jesus Christ with these same hands that give bodies to demons? O criminal hands, deserving to be cut off! I might, I say, level the very same reproach at those sinners who fashion out of their detestable thoughts idols which they caress and worship. Idolatrous Christians, dare you lift up to the true God a mind that worships idols it has fashioned for itself, or received from the devil? Dare you offer God a heart defiled by a thousand shameful indulgences? O guilty mind! O criminal heart, worthy of the severest punishment!

Do not doubt it, says Tertullian: God's judgment extends even to bare thoughts and to naked wills—I mean, to the desires that remain within, clothed in no outward act. Divine judgment holds even mere thoughts and naked wills to account. Would you have a great example of this? I find one in the Flood. You may well believe that monstrous crimes brought it about, and you are not mistaken. But do you know which crime, among all the rest, most provoked the justice of God? It was not those shameless acts of impurity that made the very sun blush, but the evil thoughts that men nourished within their hearts. God saw that men thought only of evil, says Scripture, that they meditated on nothing else. This sight drew down his vengeance, and threw open all the treasuries of his wrath: God saw that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was continually bent only upon evil. He punishes such thoughts most severely in hell as well, adds Saint Augustine: an eternal fire shall search out their very marrow, their thoughts, and their bones. How compelling this motive is, my brothers, to check the unbridled license of our imagination, to bind us to fight generously against the tempting spirit, and to win as many victories as he launches assaults against our minds and our hearts! May God grant you this grace. Amen.

ON THE ILLUSION OF THOSE WHO MAKE PIETY CONSIST ONLY IN WORDS OR IN PURELY OUTWARD WORKS

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end leads to death."

(Proverbs 16.)

It is a most judicious observation of the great Saint Augustine, my brothers, that, although nothing is more opposed to one another than vice and virtue, it nevertheless often happens that the former knows how to disguise itself so well that, in the estimation of men, it easily passes for virtue. This is one of the devil's most dangerous artifices. He has employed it since the very beginning of the world, and he still employs it every day. It was thus that this father of lies deceived our first parents, tempting them with the lure of a false knowledge and an illusory divinity. It was thus that, for so many centuries, this deceiver beguiled entire nations, leading them to worship empty idols in place of the true God. It is thus, too, that ever since the light of the Gospel dispelled the darkness of paganism, he has deceived so many heretics, leading them to accept as legitimate a counterfeit doctrine he had maliciously foisted upon them. And it is thus that, every day still, he deceives countless Christians who consider themselves saints, though their devotion is false and their virtue mere hypocrisy.

For, my brothers, there are two kinds of hypocrisy. The first belongs to those who, feeling in their own conscience that they are worthless, nevertheless wish to pass for good people and to impose upon others. The second belongs to those who believe themselves to be saints, or at least on the road to salvation, though before God they are abominable creatures already far advanced along the road to hell; and so they deceive themselves. The Wise

Man has noted this second kind of hypocrisy: there are wicked men who feel as secure as though their conduct matched that of the righteous—though I count this the height of vanity. They imagine they will fly up to heaven, borne on the wings of an imaginary virtue, and they fall instead, crushed beneath the weight of their true iniquities, into the depths of hell.

Here, my brothers, is a subject of the utmost importance, and one, nevertheless, rather rarely treated from the pulpit. I have good reason, then, to hope this discourse will not be without profit, if you favor me with your attention. Let us proceed methodically, and undeceive two kinds of people who are strangely mistaken. The first are those who place their righteousness in speaking well of virtue, without troubling to practice it. The second are those who make virtue consist entirely in outward works, without any concern for what lies within. Hail, Mary.

FIRST PART

The first kind of hypocrisy belongs to those whose virtue exists only on the tongue, and not at all in the heart or in the hands. I find its portrait, and its condemnation, drawn together in these words of the Lord: Hypocrites, Isaiah was right to say of you: this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Such people speak like the righteous and live like sinners. They preach the truth and practice nothing but vice, and, as Saint Paul says, they profess to know God, yet deny him by their works.

Engage such people in talk of spiritual things, and they will astonish you with talk of the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice. They know the finest and most weighty maxims of the spiritual life. You would take them for saints, and it is likely that, from saying so so often, they come to believe they truly possess the holiness of which they speak so eloquently.

If these same people speak to God, they use the very same language. They know a great many prayers, a thousand offerings of themselves, a thousand vows never again to offend God, to keep their heart for him alone. Ah, how beautiful all this is, how devout it sounds! Yes—but it is only the tongue that speaks; the hand and the heart say nothing; and, as Saint Bernard puts it, these are fine words and nothing more; deeds do not follow: splendid words, but only words; a long tongue but a short hand; trees with lovely leaves but no fruit.

Enter, my brothers, the homes of these people you have heard speak like angels, who seemed in church to be saints; look into the secret life of their households. You will be astonished to find disorder reigning throughout their conduct. No unity, no charity, no kindness; children poorly raised, servants left undisciplined, workers underpaid; a greed for possessions, usury in their contracts, deceit and false dealing in business, corruption in office—in short, every sort of crime and injustice.

Such, all too often, are these people who can discourse so eloquently on virtue and holiness—people whom, nonetheless, I am going to convict of self-deception, both by the testimony of their own conscience and by that of all of Scripture.

I say, first, by the testimony of their own conscience. Let me ask you, my brother: is your virtue as solid as you claim? Is it enough to give you hope that you will one day be counted among the blessed? You tell me, first, that you have faith. You know its definition and its properties; you speak of it with praise. But your faith exists only in your words, and that is nothing at all. It must, says Saint James, show itself in your works. What acts of virtue have you performed? Where is your resistance to sin? Where are your victories over temptation? By what sign can it be known that you have faith, and how can you be told apart from one who has none? I cannot see the heart; I can see

only hands and deeds. A pagan deceives his neighbor—do you not deceive yours? A pagan speaks ill of others—does it not happen to you as well? A pagan loves pleasure—do you not love it too? A pagan swears by his gods, and you by yours. Tell me, then, by what I am to know that you have faith.

You say you hope in God, that you trust in his goodness. You say it, but these are only words. For if this were truly so, why all this anxiety, as though you expected everything from your own labor and your own resourcefulness? Whence comes this attachment to earthly goods, this concern to secure powerful friends? If God alone is your support, whence come all these fears, all this distrust, as though you feared the earth itself might fail you? Why are you so tightfisted toward the poor, as if God were not rich enough to reward your almsgiving, and faithful enough to fulfill his promise to repay you a hundredfold? Why, finally, this sadness, these murmurs, this impatience, whenever some loss or affliction befalls you? Is this what you call putting your hope in God?

You say further that you fear God. Why, then, do you offend him so often? Is it fearing him to do in his presence what you would not do in the presence of your own servant? Is it fearing him to live at ease and sleep untroubled, though you know you have offended him? Is it fearing him, finally, to let whole years pass without a single thought of reconciling yourself to him?

You say, at last, that you love him; you sing the praises of charity everywhere; you have the finest understanding of it; you address God only in sighs. But where are the proofs of this charity? What have you done for God? What have you suffered for love of him? When it came to choosing between God's side and that of your friends, which prevailed? When you found yourself compelled to displease God or to go against your own inclinations, to set aside your own opinions out of deference to his Church, which did you choose? Have you not preferred to him some accursed self-interest, some brutish

passion, some stubborn obstinacy? And you call this loving God! A gross illusion. No one loves God who is not ready to give up everything, and to die a thousand times over rather than offend him. Whoever is not so disposed is a liar if he claims to love God. It is, then, self-deception, my brothers, to believe you possess virtue when it lives only on your lips, while your deeds give the lie to your words.

Let us complete this proof from the very oracles of Scripture. I begin with those of the Savior of the world. He declares that to be saved it is not enough to cry out to him, "Lord, Lord"; one must do the will of the heavenly Father and keep his law: not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. All of Scripture abounds in like testimony. Ask David who shall enter the divine dwelling God prepares for his chosen ones. He will answer that it is the one who does what is right and practices no deceit. Ask Saint James what must be done to be saved. He will tell you good works are absolutely necessary. Ask Saint Paul who will be justified before God. He will tell you it is not those who hear and know the law, but those who keep it, who shall be justified.

But what, great Apostle? If I speak, if I preach, if I know how to discourse eloquently on holiness and virtue; if I can explain the finest maxims of the spiritual life; if I have the gift of touching hearts and converting sinners—will this not suffice to save me? No, says this Apostle; even were you to speak the language of the most eloquent men on earth, even that of angels, this language, if it stood alone, would never profit you anything; and if you have nothing more, you are but an empty bronze that resounds—sounding brass, a clanging cymbal. On the day of judgment, you will not be asked whether you spoke well, but whether you acted well; and, as the holy man Job says, heaven

is not for those who have only a tongue, but for those who have hands and arms.

But if I pray fervently to God, if I spend long hours in church, if I recite countless rosaries, if I say the whole Divine Office—will none of this avail me? If there is nothing more, if your deeds do not match your words and your prayers, no, once again. On the contrary, you will be punished all the more severely. It is the Savior of the world himself who says so. Listen to his words: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who devour the houses of widows under the pretense of saying long prayers! For this you shall receive an even harsher judgment.

But nothing seems more terrible to me than the reproaches and threats God himself levels at these hypocrites of whom I speak. Sinner, he says, why do you presume to speak of my justice and my holy commandments, you who do not keep them? But to the sinner God said: Why do you recite my statutes, and take my covenant upon your lips?

You speak only of self-renunciation, of an ordered life, of victories over your passions, of obedience to the law, while, a secret enemy of that very law, you follow blindly the wanderings of your own heart: you have despised discipline, and cast my words behind you.

You speak of detachment, of contempt for riches, as though you were a man wholly of heaven, while, unmoved by the miseries of the poor, you strip the widow and the orphan, and your hand seizes from another what you strive to make him despise: when you saw a thief, you ran along with him.

You affect in your speech the bearing of a modest man, even a harsh and austere one; you speak against sensual pleasure like an angel, and give yourself over to it like a man. Never do you reproach yourself, either for the

accursed flame that burns within you, or for your hypocritical zeal amid your own pleasures: you have cast in your lot with adulterers.

I let you speak as a hypocrite, I let you live as a pagan. I held my peace: this you did, and I kept silent. But at last my anger is about to break forth. Of the two men bound up in you, one shall be judge, and the other the guilty party. I will set you before your very self; I will bring you to condemn your own conduct out of your own mouth; and, in this final extremity, you will see whether you can defend yourself: I will reprove you, and lay your sins before your very eyes.

From all this, my brothers, it is easy to conclude that those deceive themselves, and live in illusion, who think that holiness consists only in words, prayers, and devotions. Let them know, then, that such holiness is worthless for entering paradise, and that without good works they will never merit heaven. But enough has now been said of this first kind of hypocrisy.

SECOND PART

The second kind is the one the Son of God attacks in the persons of the scribes and Pharisees, who placed all their righteousness in outward works, without troubling themselves over what lay within. Thus we see certain hypocrites so blinded as to believe that, provided their outward conduct is well ordered, it matters little whether the inner life is as well; and though they admit that, to be saved, one must avoid evil and do good, they imagine it suffices to discharge these duties merely outwardly. Two arguments will convict these hypocrites of self-deception.

The first is that, with the heart alone, apart from outward deeds, there is no sin so enormous that it cannot be committed. The second is that, without the heart, there is no true virtue at all. Let us explain both truths briefly.

I say, then, that the heart alone, apart from outward deeds, can commit the gravest sins. This truth needs no proof. But it will be brought vividly home by a very apt comparison Saint Augustine draws. Picture a wolf entering a sheepfold, bent on slaughtering some of the flock. But he finds the shepherd on watch and the dogs barking, and is forced to withdraw without his prey; and in withdrawing thus, says this teacher, he is no less a wolf than he was on his way in: only a wolf came, and only a wolf departs. The whole difference is that, having arrived full of fury, he leaves gripped by fear. Yet he remains equally a wolf, both in his fury and in his fear: he comes snarling, he leaves trembling, but he is still only a wolf, whether snarling or trembling. So it is with the sinner. If his heart has formed the design of some evil deed, and if, out of fear or some other human motive, he was unable or did not dare carry out what he had planned, he is no less guilty before God: he remains only a wolf, whether snarling or trembling. This is the teaching of Saint Augustine. What am I saying? It is the teaching of Jesus Christ himself, who assures us that whoever desires to sin with a woman is as guilty as if he had actually done so: he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

This is so true that theologians teach that the outward act is, of itself, incapable of adding to the essential malice already present in the will. For since the goodness or malice of an action is determined by the end for which it is done, and since the heart alone can know and will this end, it is plain that the essential malice of sin resides in the interior act.

From this truth, my brothers, it is easy to conclude that as many evil desires as the heart forms, so many sins it commits, and that these sins are no different from the outward acts that are desired. A vindictive man wishes his enemy dead a hundred times a day. As many wishes formed, with each moral interruption between them, so many murders committed. A lustful man forms a hundred desires each day. As many desires, so many sins—and mortal sins

at that. A thousand desires, a thousand sins that change in kind according to the person in view. If she is a relative, it is incest; if a married woman, adultery; if a person consecrated to God, sacrilege—circumstances that it is absolutely necessary to disclose in confession, and this is precisely what the hypocrites of whom I speak fail to do, since they feel no scruple even over these interior acts and desires.

The second argument I put forward to convict these hypocrites of self-deception is that, without the heart, there is no true virtue, and therefore no merit at all. I have already said, my brothers, that it is the end, the intention, that determines the goodness or the malice of an act. Now, it belongs to the heart alone to will this end. If, then, the heart is guilty, the outward act cannot be innocent. If water is foul at its source, it will not run clear in the stream; and, to borrow the Savior's own words, a bad tree does not bear good fruit.

There lies the difference between works of craft and acts of virtue. In works of craft, only the excellence of the finished work matters. But in acts of virtue, it is the goodness of the workman alone that counts. There, the hand and its skill are everything; here, the heart and the intention hold the greater share—so that if the heart is not good, if the intention is not upright, if the end is not legitimate, the act can only be evil.

And this, says Saint Augustine, is what so often corrupted the finest actions of the pagans. Their end was, as a rule, a bad one; pride was almost always its principle. Thus their virtue had only the appearance of virtue, and was not virtue at all—like those deceptive fruits whose color is perfectly beautiful while the core is rotten. This is what still ruins the holiest actions of a great many Christians. They fast, they pray, they give alms, they perform mortifications and penances. But because these actions so often spring from a corrupt heart, because self-love or vanity lies at their root, all these outwardly

holy deeds, far from earning heaven, draw down instead upon those who perform them treasures of wrath for the last judgment, where the very anatomy of their hearts will be laid bare before the whole world, where the most secret intentions and the most hidden designs will be exposed—and where what you truly intend, hypocrites, in your penances, your alms, and your devotions, will be brought fully to light.

Do not deceive yourselves, then, my brothers; once again, it is the heart, it is the intention, that gives worth to our actions; it is this alone that determines their value. You communicate often. Happy are you if you prepare for it with care, if you do so with a pure and upright intention, if you bring to it every necessary disposition. But if, on the contrary, you communicate in a state of sin, your heart, still attached to sin, aims at some end other than God and your own sanctification; your frequent communions, instead of raising you higher toward heaven, will sink you deeper into hell. You go often to church. But of what use is this to you, if, through your own fault and negligence, you are there without inward devotion and without reverence? You fast, you give alms. The Pharisee did both—indeed, he did them more than you, since he fasted regularly twice a week and gave a tenth of his goods to the poor—and yet he is damned. Do you really believe God feels greatly honored by your fasts, your alms, and your other good works, if your heart does not belong to him, if it belongs instead to his enemy, if it is corrupt and full of filth? In truth, can you call it fasting to abstain from meat while gorging yourself on sin, to starve the mouth while filling the heart with evil desires? Can you call it almsgiving to clothe a poor man’s nakedness while stripping the widow and the orphan? A ridiculous exchange; in giving alms in this manner, says Saint Augustine, you give God some small portion of your goods, and give yourself entirely to the devil. You dedicate yourselves to the saints, you belong to every confraternity. You give of your wealth to adorn churches and decorate altars. All this is good, my brothers. But if, in dedicating yourselves to the

saints, you leave your own soul enslaved to the devil; if, in having your name enrolled in confraternities, you live like an unbeliever; if, in adorning altars, your own soul remains stripped of the ornaments of grace; if, in offering God your possessions, you withhold from him your heart, your love, your obedience, God values it no more than mud. Do not deceive yourselves, says the prophet Jeremiah; do not trust in lying words, saying, "This is the temple of the Lord." Though you had spent your whole fortune adorning churches, though you had built more temples and monasteries than a Saint Louis, if your own heart is not itself the temple of the Holy Spirit, if it is not cleansed of every kind of filth, then neither the beauty nor the splendor of churches, nor your alms, your fasts, your prayers, your vows, nor any of your good works will be able to save you. In a word, my brothers, if the inward does not answer to the outward, if the heart is not in accord with the hands, and the hands with the tongue, there is nothing left to hope for regarding salvation—there is only hell to expect. How pitiable, then, are these unhappy hypocrites who deceive themselves, believing themselves clean while defiled with a thousand crimes! There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its own filthiness.

Christians, my brothers, are you not perhaps among their number? Are you not among those who content themselves with speaking well of virtue without practicing it, among those who let it consist solely in outward acts, taking no care for their hearts?

It falls to you to search your own inner life. It is of the utmost importance that you know yourselves well. Remember, then, that deeds must be joined to words, and that works themselves must be sanctified by pure intentions; in a word, that we must come to God without pretense, in complete sincerity. This is the only way to escape an eternity of torment, and to merit an eternity of happiness. Amen.

ON ENVY

"Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"

(Matthew.)

If ever there was a greatness that ought not to have provoked envy, my brothers, it was that of Jesus Christ. It was extraordinary, raised to so lofty a height, that envy itself—envious as it is—was sometimes compelled to regard it with more admiration than resentment. It was just; truth sustained it, and the Son of God had risen to it only through dazzling miracles and virtues yet more admirable still. Finally, it was beneficent; Jesus Christ seemed to hold power only in order to bestow grace and relieve the wretched.

Yet he had his enviers. His glory wounded the jealous eyes of the chief priests and the doctors of the law. They were scandalized by the praise given him. The benefits men received from him only provoked them further. At the very moment he had just fed five thousand men with five loaves, and healed every one he had touched, they came to him, driven by this jealous spirit, with absurd complaints about his disciples, searching their conduct for some fault to lay against their Master, whose own conduct was beyond reproach: Why do your disciples transgress the precepts of the elders? And so what delighted others, says Saint Chrysostom, became for them a keen affliction. Who, after this, my brothers, would dare hope to use his good fortune with such modesty as never to stir envy? Greatness, however modest, will always have its enviers.

Nothing is so common in the world as envy, though in truth it does not belong to the world at all. It draws its origin from a source yet more corrupt. Envy is the sin of demons. It was born in their hearts; and if it is true that we commit no sin that does not have its origin in the heart of the devil, it is equally certain

that envy issues from it more particularly than any other sin. The demons inspired it in us only after gathering together the whole of their malice, and, if one may say so, only after stirring and wringing their very entrails to extract the most dangerous poison of all: in this wickedness the serpent convulses his very entrails, and vomits forth the plague of the malice he means to instill—as Saint Gregory the Great says.

I observe, indeed, my brothers, that envy bears the true stamp of that infamous heart which may be summed up in two words: a wicked and an unhappy heart. Its malice is fruitful, and its misery is deplorable. Now envy stamps this double seal upon the heart of the envious man, says Saint Chrysostom. From a man, he becomes a demon. He takes on the malice of demons, and suffers all their torments as well. Hail, Mary.

FIRST PART

The barrenness of monsters in nature does not extend to sin, which Saint Thomas calls a monster in the moral order. God's goodness is too generous to prevent the multiplication of the one; the malice of men or of demons is too great not to swell the number of the other. Sins possess a fecundity as great as it is disastrous. This is why the holy Fathers, tracing out their genealogy, said that avarice, for example, is the mother of betrayals, of deceptions, of anxieties, of violent acts, and of callousness, and that blindness of mind, imprudence, inconstancy, rashness, self-love, forgetfulness of God, and attachment to this present world are the offspring of impurity.

Other sins form similar alliances; but among them all, none has a fecundity greater than that of envy: widely does the manifold and fruitful ruin of jealousy spread, says Saint Cyprian. It is the root of every evil, the source of every injustice, the origin of every disorder, the raw material of every sin. Would you see its whole abominable family? Open the heart of the devil. It

was through envy that he sinned, and that he led the first man into sin: by this he both perished and brought ruin, says Saint Cyprian. The envy he felt at God's greatness caused him to sin, and this jealous feeling gave birth in his heart to hatred, disobedience, pride, impatience, anger, and the other crimes that were his undoing. The envy he bore toward the happiness of the first man led him to resolve on his ruin, and from this sprang the abominations and crimes which, to borrow the words of Scripture, still form today, in the world, a more disastrous flood than the one that once overwhelmed the earth.

Ah, my brothers, how many crimes would have been prevented, had this jealous spirit heeded his envy less! But he satisfied it fully, and, acting in a manner befitting the greatness of his own malice, once he had roused it within his own heart, he often carries it over into the hearts of men, where it never enters without bringing with it the fruits of its detestable fecundity. Hatred, animosity, greed, and ambition go with it. It blinds the mind, and, in blinding it, says Saint Cyprian, leads it to despise the majesty of God, trample his laws underfoot, and forget his judgments. No sooner has it taken hold of a heart than pride exalts it, cruelty hardens it, treachery corrupts it, impatience stirs it, anger sets it aflame, and the desire for vengeance kindles it further. A heart possessed by envy no longer possesses itself, and plunges without restraint into every kind of crime. Breaking the bonds of peace, violating the claims of charity, forsaking the gentleness of unity, entangling itself in heresy and schism—these are excesses that cost it nothing further. There is no injustice so extreme, no outburst so brutal, no treachery so black, no cruelty so barbarous, of which it does not make itself guilty: widely does the manifold and fruitful ruin of jealousy spread. Indeed, says Saint Chrysostom, if there are enmities among men, quarrels between craftsmen and merchants, divisions within states, disturbances within families, heresies and schisms within the Church, does not nearly all of this disorder spring from envy alone? In a word, it does every evil it can, and longs to do the evil it cannot.

But let us leave these general remarks and turn to particulars, which may perhaps prove useful. All sins, says Saint Jerome, may be reduced to three kinds. Some are committed within the heart, and these we call sins of thought. Others take shape through the tongue, and these are sins of word. Still others are carried out by the hands, and these are sins of deed. Must not the malice of envy be exceedingly fruitful, my brothers, if it renders a man guilty of all three kinds of sin at once? This is exactly what I am now going to show you, and I can assure you beforehand that it is difficult for any other passion to poison the heart, sharpen the tongue, or harden the hand more thoroughly than envy does when it stirs them.

Since it is a base and shameful passion, whoever is possessed by it does not dare let it show. The envious, as a rule, keep their envy a secret they disclose to no one, confiding it only within themselves. Under a contented appearance and outwardly decent manners, they harbor their venom within their hearts, secretly nursing their jealousy there—a jealousy which, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa observes, is a fire that consumes them. This fire is none other than hatred, which Saint Thomas numbers among the offspring of envy. Now, who among us does not know that the fire of hatred is a dark and dreadful fire? He who hates his brother, says Scripture, is in darkness, and walks in darkness, not knowing where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. Now, when one dwells in darkness, and walks within it, when one is blinded by it, what feelings can one possibly harbor? What thoughts can one have but thoughts that are dark, ruinous, and despairing?

If the envious man foresees that the innocent object of his fury is soon to suffer some loss, he seeks a way to hasten his ruin and speed the collapse of his fortune. He can imagine no sweeter pleasure than gloating over his enemy’s humiliation. If he sees his enemy’s virtue about to be rewarded, he plots intrigues to raise obstacles against him; he consults the whole of his own

malice, and holds within his heart a secret council in which envy presides, in which every passion offers its counsel, and in which the most wicked resolutions always win the greatest approval. Blinded by the malignity that possesses him, he sometimes thinks he sees what is not there, and sometimes misreads what he truly does see. He divines what he does not know, says Scripture, and, upon the uncertainty of his own conjectures, builds firm judgments: like a diviner, he estimates by guesswork what he does not know. He poisons the most innocent actions; he imagines mystery everywhere; he counts even the words spoken; he studies even the glances exchanged. Everything disturbs him, everything wounds him; he broods over everything, and there is not a single reflection he makes that does not deepen his own despair. This, my brothers, is what passes within the heart of an envious man; such is the very manner of his thinking, and if at times his tongue betrays the secret of his heart, his words show as much malice as his thoughts show injustice.

The tongue is far less to be feared when it serves an open enemy and a declared hatred. If the blows it deals are dangerous, they are at least foreseen, and once foreseen they carry less force. But when it serves a secret jealousy, ah, how cruel its blows then become! It strikes with as much malice as fury. The envious man, says Saint Basil, plays two quite remarkable roles at once. He declares himself the friend of the afflicted and the enemy of the fortunate. He seems moved by the sorrow of the former; he offers them comfort. He is provoked by the happiness of the latter, and speaks ill of them; and whether he consoles or slanders, he is equally harmful.

Does a man of honor fall into some misfortune, does he suffer some loss, does death take from him his wife or his children? The envious man, who could not bear his good fortune, now comes to sympathize with his affliction. He exaggerates the magnitude of the loss; he reminds him how cruel it is to have

lost so virtuous and wise a wife, such lovable children of such great promise, a position held for so long and with such honor. He seems to wish to console, but he speaks only to sharpen the wound; he reopens old injuries; he wounds under the guise of healing.

But to grasp the full depth of his malice, one must hear him speak of the fortunate people he has declared his enemies. For every word he utters, says Saint Gregory of Nyssa, he launches a poisoned dart. He reaches back to the very ancestors of those whose glory he cannot bear; he unearths deeds buried in oblivion for centuries. He probes the secrets of families, invents crimes where he knows of none, and, where he cannot deny some fine action, has the skill to attach circumstances that tarnish its beauty. I tell you nothing you do not already know, my brothers; how often have you not heard, told in the cruellest manner imaginable, of two magistrates vying for the same office, two officials seeking the same post, two merchants competing for the same profit, two women who, not wise enough to contest the prize of virtue, were vain enough to contest that of beauty?

But envy does not stop there. Having rolled unjust thoughts about within the heart, having spread pernicious words abroad, it sometimes goes on to commit criminal acts—which seems to be why Saint Paul so often couples it with murder, as though persuaded that an envious man is by nature cruel: full of envy and murder, he says, speaking of the pagans whom God had abandoned to their own passions. They were envious and murderous; and in his catalogue of the works of the flesh, he again unites these two crimes, envy and murder: envyings, murders. Indeed, they have been united since the very beginning of time. The devil was envious, and stripped the first man of the life of his soul: a murderer from the beginning. Cain was envious, and took from his brother the life of his body. The Babylonians were envious, and left nothing undone to destroy the prophet Daniel. Saul was envious, and made repeated attempts on

the life of David. The Jews were envious of Jesus Christ. Can one think of this without astonishment and horror? Out of envy they refused to be his disciples, and became his enemies instead. They preferred to persecute him rather than believe in him, says Saint Cyprian, and their jealousy at last drove them to deliver him into Pilate's hands and to crucify him: he knew that they had handed him over out of envy.

One does not always go to such extremes, I grant; one does not always attempt the life of those whose happiness one cannot bear. But if we do them no harm, we wish them harm nonetheless, and you know that just as there are adulteries of the heart, so too there are murders committed only in the will. It is with good reason, then, that I have said the fecundity of envy's malice is in no way inferior to that of demons.

Ah, my brothers, must we wish so much evil upon a man merely because some good has befallen him? If he sought the same position you did, was he bound to yield it to you? If he succeeded, is he guilty for having been more fortunate than you? Perhaps, had you won it instead, he would not have complained at all. Must we hate a man because he is good, wish him ill because he is happy, condemn him because he is innocent, despise him because he possesses merit? If this is the fury that drives you, detestable enviers, then it is God you rage against, and not men; you would sunder the very traffic between heaven and earth. You do no good yourselves, and cannot bear that others should. You therefore declare war on every virtue; you fight against the Spirit of God; you set yourselves against the outpourings of his goodness; you would dry up the very wellspring of his graces.

Ah, how pitiable you are! The passion that possesses you, though you are men, will turn you into demons. You already share their malice; you shall suffer all their torments as well.

SECOND PART

Of all the passions, envy is at once the most unjust and the most just, as Saint Gregory of Nazianzus observed. The declared enemy of good people, can one doubt that it is the most unjust of the passions? Yet is it not also the most just, being, as it is, the very executioner of the envious themselves? Its fury is discreet, says a holy Father; its rage is cunning, since it visits its first effects upon those who give it life. It inflicts upon them a thousand torments, and treats them with such cruelty that it has been called the hell of the heart. Just as this world knows many kinds of purgatory, so too there are many kinds of hell, and among them, that of the envious. Scripture itself consecrates this expression, when it says that the torments of the envious equal those of hell: jealousy is as cruel as the grave. And Saint Augustine used the same figure when, expounding the words of the prophet—"the sorrows of hell surrounded me"—he understood by these sorrows of hell the very sorrows of the envy his enemies bore him: the sorrows of envy encompassed me. Ah, how cruel such sorrows are! The demons themselves suffer none more terrible.

The envy that gnaws at the devil is one of his greatest torments. He suffered strangely, says Saint Ambrose, when God, in his very presence, pronounced the praises of Job; and if we believe Saint Bernard, God has placed a portion of the evil spirits in the air for this very reason—that, seeing men pass from earth to heaven, the sight might provoke their jealousy, and that this jealousy might become their own torment: he has been allotted a place in the air, so that he might envy the just and be tormented by his envy. Now, if envy can torment demons, can we doubt that it turns the human heart into a hell as well? No, my brothers; an envious man is no less wretched than the demons, and he endures torments that yield to theirs neither in number nor in duration.

The royal prophet spoke of the countless torments of hell when he said it is impossible to number the fury of God's anger: who can number the fury of his

wrath? This manner of speaking would be pointless were it not understood to refer to the multitude of torments endured in hell. Now I dare say the envious man suffers them all. There are torments in hell that afflict the soul, and he suffers them, since, according to Saint Augustine, envy is the executioner of souls. There are torments that afflict the body, and he suffers those too, since, according to the oracle of Scripture, envy is the rottenness of the bones.

By the mere pallor of his face, the trouble visible in his eyes, his sorrowful bearing, his restlessness, his sighs, one perceives that the envious man suffers more than a single torment. Saint Peter Chrysologus sums it up in two words. He suffers, he says, as many evils as he envies different goods, and as many as there are happy people in the world: as many as are the prosperities of men, so many are the torments of the envious. Hence a pagan author's rather clever notion, that he wished the eyes of an envious man might be everywhere, so that he might suffer in as many places as he saw prosperity. What is certain is that, though he cannot be everywhere, he suffers wherever he is. He carries his own hell about with him.

What God, according to Saint Bernard, has done to torment a great number of demons—placing them in the air—he still does every day with regard to the envious. He permits, for instance, this courtier to remain at court, to hear the praises given to others, to see the rewards bestowed on those whose advancement he cannot endure, so that he may be tormented through his own eyes and ears. He permits this merchant to be set among many others, so that, for every customer he sees entering his rivals' shops, for every report of their success that reaches his ears, his own senses become his own executioners, and he feels himself cruelly torn apart by his own envy. He permits this clergyman to witness the compliments paid to others for their learning, their eloquence, or their virtue; he permits this woman to hear people of her own rank praised for their beauty or their wit, so that the envy of each is further

inflamed, tormenting them mercilessly in everything they see or hear, and so that their torments, like those of the demons, endure forever without a moment's relief.

The adulterer, says Saint Chrysostom, seeks a wretched satisfaction in his crime, and commits it in a brief span of time. But the envious man is so utterly possessed by his passion that it grants him no truce whatsoever. His crime is committed and endures without end. Other passions know some measure of peace; envy knows none: an endless sin, Saint Cyprian calls it. What peace, indeed, could it ever enjoy? Will there not always be happy people in the world? Will there not always be prosperity to be seen? So long as such things occur, then, the envious man suffers; he suffers, therefore, always. Yes, my brothers, he suffers continually. Like that unclean spirit spoken of in Saint Luke, he seeks in vain some rest through a desire natural to him, and finds none, because restlessness and turmoil are punishments inseparable from his sin. Whatever he does—whether he pours himself out toward others, or withdraws into his own heart—he turns and twists within his torment, wounded, as Scripture puts it, by a thorn he cannot pull free, one that has pierced him to the very heart, into the substance of his own soul. In a word, an envious man suffers always, without consolation, without end, and his torment will follow him even into hell.

The wicked rich man, once so pitiless, has himself become jealous; and if we believe Saint Chrysostom, his jealousy is now his most dreadful torment. The sight of heaven, where he beholds Lazarus, torments him more than the hell in which he dwells among the demons; he is set more on fire by the sight of heaven than by hell itself. He would complain less of his own torments were Lazarus not happy.

Whatever we make of this thought, it remains always true that the cruellest torment of demons is to suffer without any consolation whatsoever—and such

precisely is the wretched fate of an envious man. Of all the comforts we may hope for in this world, says Cassiodorus, none is sweeter than having a friend into whose breast we may safely pour out the secrets of our soul. But this comfort is not for the envious man. He has almost no friends; or, if he has any, he dares not reveal himself to them. Since there is nothing in his passion but what is base, cowardly, and hateful, he dares not declare it; he hides it as best he can. Consumed by a dreadful grief, he wears a feigned joy and a cheerful face; and from this, says Saint Basil, comes the fact that this hidden evil tears at him all the more cruelly, wreaking terrible havoc within his soul; from this comes the fact that everything within him and around him causes him pain. The past torments him, the present afflicts him, the future troubles him. His very eyes and ears seem to serve no purpose but to sustain and increase his torment: since he can neither murmur nor dare speak, he is silently torn apart within himself. So true is it that no punishment is better suited to chastise an envious man than envy itself, and that this torment is in no way inferior to that of the demons.

Who, nevertheless, could ever believe that so criminal a passion—one that makes us resemble demons, that is the mother of so many vices and the source of so much suffering—could be so common? Despite the fruitfulness of its malice, despite the suffering and sorrow it causes, it reigns in a thousand hearts. It reigns among magistrates and craftsmen; it reigns at court and among the common people. I cannot add this without sorrow—but should I conceal it? It reigns among the ministers of the Church even more than among the rest of the faithful. It has, indeed, reigned there always. It has set great men against one another, and has spared not even the greatest saints. Jealousy raised up several enemies against Saint Jerome, against a patriarch, against bishops, and against hermits. No sooner had Saint Paulinus appeared in Rome than he was put to the test by the envy of several clergymen, and even of a great pope, Siricius. What troubles have such envies not caused within the

Church? How many schisms have they not provoked? Was it not the jealousy of certain religious that gave birth, two centuries ago, to those disastrous heresies whose decline we now witness by a miracle of divine Providence?

It is true, Lord, that we feel only too keenly the disastrous effects of this cruel passion. We know its malice and its harm. But it belongs to your grace alone to heal us of it. Grant it to us, O my God! Pour into our hearts the charity that is its sovereign remedy. May our neighbor's happiness be our own joy, may his misfortune be our own, and may the inner turmoil that tears at us give way to a peace that endures both in this life and in the life to come. Amen.

ON SLOTH

"Why do you stand here idle all day?"

(Matthew 20.)

It is not only violent passions that are to be feared, my brothers. Sloth, languid though it seems, is infinitely to be dreaded. Whether a vineyard is ravaged by wild beasts, or neglected by the one who ought to tend it, is it not equally thrown into ruin? Whether a heart is torn by violent passions, or lulled into a kind of slumber by the languor of sloth, is it not equally to be pitied? When avarice, ambition, love, or anger tear at a heart, and these turbulent passions make it feel all their ardor and violence, I regard it as a vineyard ravaged by wild boars, left as pasture for savage beasts: the boar of the forest has laid it waste, says the royal Prophet, and the wild beast of the field has devoured it. When sloth softens the heart, and, languishing in idleness, it has no courage left for any vigorous action, I regard it as a vineyard left untended, one the vinedresser never prunes, choked with weeds, full of nettles, covered in thorns, just as the Wise Man describes the vineyard of the sluggard: I passed by the vineyard of a foolish man, and behold, it was entirely overgrown with nettles, and its face was covered with thistles.

These two states, my brothers, are almost equally to be feared. I am not even certain it is not easier to defend oneself against the violence of other passions than against the languor of sloth. At the very least, it is certain that sloth alone corrupts more hearts than all the other passions combined, and this for two very notable reasons: we do not fear sloth, and we do not recognize it. One is slothful without knowing it; and once one knows it, one takes no trouble over it. We believe it is not very dangerous to do nothing, and we do nothing precisely when we believe ourselves most occupied. This is what we shall see in the present discourse: two great truths will divide it between them. It is

extremely dangerous to be idle—first truth; whatever one may do, not to labor for one's salvation is itself to be idle—second truth; both truths important, and both worthy of your attention. Hail, Mary.

FIRST PART

There is nothing more innocent than the desire to be happy, and nothing that produces more guilty souls than this very desire. God himself placed it within our hearts. It is born with us, and, since it comes to us from the very author of nature, it is just and legitimate. Yet, natural and innocent as it is, this desire is often the source of the gravest crimes. We become guilty in seeking to be happy, because we err in the choice of the object in which our happiness is to consist. Why do you suppose, asks Saint Augustine, that the man of pleasure devotes such assiduous care and attention to seducing a woman's heart? Because he promises himself supreme happiness in his conquest, in the satisfaction of his brutish passion: he seeks his happiness in this very evil. Why does this miser make himself infamous through his injustices, his frauds, his extortions, his usury? He imagines he will not begin to be happy until he has amassed great riches: he heaps up wealth so that he may be happy.

Idleness is one of the poisoned streams that flow from this same source. We wish to be happy, and, because we persuade ourselves that happiness lies in the repose of an idle and useless life, we shun every kind of effort, and shape for ourselves a way of living steeped in sloth and languor.

Add to this that it is far more common to attach this notion of happiness to idleness than to the other passions. In the others there is something restless and turbulent that soon wearies the heart. Love has its suspicions, avarice its worries, ambition its setbacks, and these various pains gradually weaken the heart's inclination to indulge such passions. It is not the same with sloth. It draws the heart in ever closer proportion as it weakens it. It is a secret charm

that suspends the soul's other desires, that takes the place of everything, that consoles for everything, and that, removing from the heart all that is painful and troublesome in action, enchants it with a kind of repose resembling true happiness. Will you not admit as much, whoever you may be, who love this idle and unoccupied way of life? Is it not this very notion of happiness that makes you love it—you, ladies, who, having lost the whole morning in bed—that time so well suited to prayer, to reading, to devout exercises, and to the ordering of your households, those precious hours for a Christian, who ought to blush with shame, says Saint Augustine, at not having risen before the sun—you, I say, who, having spent long hours at your toilette, have nothing left to occupy you for the rest of the day; you, gentlemen, who so often do not know how to pass the time, who have no other occupation than strolling and gambling? Tell me, do you not love this idle, languid way of living, because you believe you will find your happiness in it?

But how false, how deceptive is this notion of happiness! You believe that to do nothing is to be happy. But what, indeed, is happiness? The removal of every evil, the gathering together of every good. There is, I think, no better definition than this. Now, do you suppose that this gathering of every good, this removal of every evil, is to be found in idleness? Far from it. Sloth opens the door to every evil and closes it against every good; and the devout Louis of Granada spoke most truly when he said that the heart of the slothful man is a hell in which, as in that of the demons, every evil is to be found, and not a single good. Let us shed further light upon these two ideas.

That idleness closes the door to every good—can this be doubted? There is not a single good that does not cost dearly to acquire. Honor, wealth, learning, virtue—none of these is obtained without effort; and, to speak only of virtue, the one truly desirable and lasting good, do you not know what it costs in labor, effort, and struggle? It is founded upon nothing but the ruin of the

passions, and it is no easy matter to destroy them. One must endure many hardships, wage many battles, before becoming humble, chaste, and patient. After a hundred acts of humility, a man who believed he had stifled his pride feels it rise again. After a long and severe penance, one who flattered himself that he no longer had any inclination toward pleasure gives way to it at the very next occasion. After doing great violence to himself, such a man imagines he no longer has to fight the impulsiveness that once made him so quick to anger, and a single word is enough to plunge him into fury once more. Passions are not easily torn from the heart. They have sunk deep roots there. They are, says Saint Bernard, like a vine whose overgrown wood has been cut back: this vine sprouts anew, this wood grows back—though cut away, it sprouts again. It must be pruned every single year. So the passions are reborn, and return again and again. It is impossible to conquer them without fighting them, without watching them, without resisting them at every moment. The slothful man is incapable of doing himself this violence. The mere thought of struggle and resistance frightens him. Yet virtue exists only through such struggles. Let it be granted, then, that to be virtuous and to be idle are two utterly incompatible things.

Activity is the distinguishing mark of virtue. It is prompt, it is active. Charity, the queen of the virtues, is incapable of rest; it is impossible for it to remain idle, says the great Augustine: love cannot lie idle in the soul of one who truly loves. Its very life consists in motion, and, like the heart itself, it ceases to live the moment it ceases to move. As for faith, you know well that it is dead without works. It governs not only what we believe, but also what we do. It is not enough to believe; one must act. Do what you say, and this, says Saint Augustine again, is truly to possess faith: do what you say, and that is faith. Hope is a generous impulse. The ardor with which it seeks the good cannot endure sloth. In short, all the virtues of the moral order are no less active than all the creatures of the natural order. In this latter order, everything is in

motion. The heavens, the stars, the elements, the plants, and all created things generally, sustain themselves only through motion. In the moral order, grace, the virtues, everything, in short, exists in continual activity. Only the slothful man rests. He is, therefore, a kind of monster—both in the natural order, whose economy he disturbs, and in the moral order, whose perfections he possesses not at all, since it is impossible for him to possess any virtue whatsoever.

Sloth, then, closes the door to every good. At the same time, it opens it to every evil. Just as untilled ground brings forth a multitude of useless weeds, so too a heart left uncultivated grows rich in evil desires and criminal thoughts. One thinks of doing wrong precisely when one does nothing at all. The Prophet-King explained this in truly divine terms. Slothful men of wealth, mark well these words; never was a portrait drawn more true to life. “These men,” he says, “do not feel human miseries as others do, and they do not suffer the punishments the rest of mankind endures. Therefore pride has taken hold of them; their injustice and their impiety cover them like a garment; their iniquity seems to spring from their very fatness and abundance, and has passed into the very affections of their heart.” How beautiful these words are! Great ones of this world, do you doubt that they are addressed to you? The curse laid upon all of Adam’s descendants does not reach as far as you. It is not for you that the earth brings forth briars and thorns. You gather only flowers. You do not eat bread earned by the sweat of your brow. All your labor is reduced to giving orders, and often to complaining without cause. In a word, you are not occupied as other men are. And what does this idleness produce? A multitude of disorders. Pride, vanity, and ambition possess you: therefore pride has taken hold of them. Injustice and impiety become second nature to you. Trampling unfortunate subjects underfoot, mistreating servants, refusing to pay your creditors, having no religion, no fear of God, no love for him, offending him even at the foot of his own altars—these are excesses that

have grown all too familiar to you: they are covered with their own iniquity and impiety. It seems as though iniquity flows forth from your very abundance: their iniquity has come forth as it were from their fatness. The more comfort you enjoy, the more impious you become. There is no passion so shameful or so brutish that you will not seek to satisfy it: they have passed over into the very affections of their heart. What a multitude of crimes! And these crimes are born of idleness alone.

Ungrateful Israelites, and you, infamous peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah, I might cite you here as examples. The Israelites had nothing to occupy them during Moses' absence, and they fell to worshipping a golden calf. They sat down to eat and to drink, says Scripture, and rose up to play. Idleness led them to seek some way of passing the time, and this pastime led them all the way to idolatry. As for the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah, those abominable peoples whose ashes still fly upon every wind, as Saint Bernard has so truly said, and whose dreadful punishment has not prevented them from finding imitators worthy of the very fires that consumed them—for these peoples, I say, according to the prophet Ezekiel, idleness was one of the sources of their disorders and their crimes: this was the iniquity of Sodom—fullness of bread, abundance, and idleness.

But why look to such distant examples? Do not most of the disorders we see about us today have their very source in sloth? If this young man were seriously occupied, if, having fulfilled his duties toward God, he applied himself to honest pursuits suited to his station, he would be sober and self-controlled. But he is idle, and so gives himself over to debauchery. If this young woman kept her hours for prayer, reading, and work; if, alongside her prayers, she joined honest and useful occupations, she would be modest and chaste. But she is idle; she is flattered; she listens, she flirts, and, without meaning to, loses herself. If this woman applied herself to the management of

her household, if she allowed visits and amusements only the time that propriety and true necessity require, she would live as a true Christian woman ought. But she takes no care at all; she is idle, and becomes either a gossip or a coquette. So true is it, as the Wise Man said, that idleness teaches every kind of wickedness: idleness has taught every wickedness. A busy man, say the holy Fathers, is tempted only by the single demon of sloth, and he does not yield to the evil this demon suggests to him; he has other things to occupy him. The slothful man is tempted by every demon at once, and, having nothing else to do, he yields to all of them. And after this, shall I not say that idleness is infinitely dangerous, since it thus closes the door to every good and throws it open to every evil?

Do not doubt it, my brothers: of all sins, one of the most dangerous is idleness. Dangerous as it is, we must nevertheless admit that it is exceedingly common in the world. There it passes for the vice of respectable people. It belongs to that class of faults that please the great, since they seem to be marks of the greatness of their fortune, as a pagan writer shrewdly observed: certain vices delight men, as it were, as proofs of their own good fortune. A lady of quality would think herself demeaned if she found her occupation in the management of her household, as though the capable woman of Scripture were not praised precisely for having kept good order in her house, and for not having eaten the bread of idleness: she looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Many would think themselves unworthy of the dignity of their rank if they were ever found occupied at anything. And so, as a rule, they do not know how to spend their time, as though this were not the most precious thing in the world, and the hardest to recover once lost. What shall we do, they ask, how shall we pass the time? Ah, how much it is to be wished that all men were made to render an account of their leisure, and that men punished not only murderers and thieves, but also the useless and the slothful! The Athenians were required to appear each year before certain

officials, and to give an account of how they had spent their time. How useful such a custom would be in our own age! How many crimes would be prevented, were sloth itself forbidden! How many Christians who might have been saved instead damn themselves! How advantageous it would be to anticipate, through such a reckoning, the judgment of God, in which we shall have to give account of time wasted no less than of idle words!

Most people are so busy, you will say, that they scarcely have time to labor for their own salvation. Yet it is precisely by this, my brothers, that I prove them to be idle. Idleness is dangerous to salvation, and of this you must be persuaded; and, whatever one does, one remains idle whenever one is not laboring toward salvation. This is what remains for me to show you.

SECOND PART

The repose of the just man is a most serious occupation, while the occupation of the sinner is a pitiable idleness: the leisure of the wise is itself labor, said Saint Bernard. He may seem useless and idle, this just man who does not meddle in the world's intrigues, who prays and meditates in secret. Yet he is, in truth, most fully occupied; he labors for his own salvation, and he has no occupation more important than this.

Of worldly men, on the contrary, it is said that they are forever astir. I grant it: they are active, they are busy, these children of this present age; they are all burdened with affairs, they have not a moment's rest or leisure—and yet they are slothful. They give no thought to their salvation, and not to think of it is itself to be idle: in their very activity, they accomplish nothing. Picture to yourself one of these men so very busy. Take, if you will, a merchant absorbed in his business from morning until night. He writes to his correspondents, he buys, he sells, he labors to be paid. Or take a litigant. He solicits his judges, he presses his advocate, he enlists his friends, he instructs his lawyer, he labors

himself over the documents of his lawsuit, he studies the codes and the laws. Or a physician. He visits his patients and cultivates his practice. Or a craftsman; for each man must study his trade and learn to master it. He labors without rest, rises before the sun, and does not lay aside his work until well into the night. All these people—this merchant, this litigant, this physician, this craftsman—are so occupied that they have not a moment's leisure. They are too pressed in the morning, too weary in the evening, to pray to God. They have no time to attend Mass. In a word, they are so overwhelmed with business that, even were they willing, they could not spare a thought for their salvation. What do you say of all these people, my brothers? Do they not seem to you exceedingly busy, exceedingly active? For my part, I judge them very useless and very slothful indeed, and I ground this judgment on authority, on reason, and on their own admissions.

Saint Paul certainly judged the matter in the same way, when he told the Thessalonians that there were men among them who were forever in a hurry and restless, yet who accomplished nothing at all: walking disorderly, doing nothing, yet meddling in the affairs of others. To be in a hurry and yet do nothing, to remain idle and yet meddle in everything—these expressions are startling indeed, and, to understand them, one must admit that a man can be, at once, both thoroughly idle and thoroughly busy. This is likewise the view of the great Augustine, who very perceptively observes that the greatest affairs of men are nothing more than amusements and children's games: what grown men busy themselves with is called their great affairs, though it is mere child's play. One would not say that a man playing with a child was very busy, though it is certainly true that children regard their games as matters of the utmost importance; and must we not admit that what occupies grown men is not so very different from what occupies children? Just as children build structures that the wind carries away, so grown men form designs that death

destroys, and both alike are idle; neither is truly laboring; both are merely amusing themselves.

To grasp this great truth fully, remember that we have but a single great business to attend to, and that whoever, having only this one business, fails to attend to it, must be reckoned idle. This is said every day. When someone neglects his affairs and fails to fulfill the duties proper to his station, we say he does nothing at all. Yet how busy he is! He runs to every messenger to learn the latest news, he gambles the whole night through, he even studies, if you will, and one can scarcely tear him away from his books. However busy he may be, he is still said to do nothing, because he does not do what he ought to be doing. Now, what is the great business of the Christian? Is it not his salvation—that one thing necessary, that all-important matter upon which an eternity depends, from which an infinite future flows, that matter of saving oneself or losing oneself forever, upon which the happiness or misery of our souls depends, that very matter which God himself regards as his own? To fail to labor at this business—is this not to do nothing at all? Is it not to be idle? Be as busy as you please; occupy yourselves in finance, in the law, in trade, in the military—so long as you spare no thought for your salvation, I say you are idle, that you do nothing, and I address to you these fine words of Saint Paul: attend to your own affairs. What you are doing is not what you ought to be doing. It is your salvation that you must labor for, if you do not wish it said of you that you do nothing at all. It is ridiculous to seek out idle occupations merely to escape idleness, says a holy Father: to chase after idle things merely to avoid idleness is itself ridiculous. Now, whatever one does, if what one does bears no relation to God, one remains idle even in the very midst of activity: even in what he does, he remains idle.

How much time is lost, if this rule holds true—as indeed it surely does! How many days there are that ought to be struck from the record of your life! How

many years that must be reckoned as nothing at all! How many busy people who are, in truth, idle! Show me a just man who has lived but a very short time, and who, having done nothing to advance his fortune, has done much to secure his salvation, and I will tell you, with Scripture, that his life was long, because it was innocent, and that he died full of days, because he died full of merit: a blameless life is itself a ripe old age. But give me a sinner—though he may have grown gray in service and at court, though he may have grown old amid business and trade—and I will tell you that this man is young, that he has far fewer years than he supposes, that he is an old man who remains, in truth, a child, that he has not lived out even half his life: they shall not live out half their days; that his days have been empty; and that, in the end, all his years shall be reckoned as nothing at all: their years shall be counted for nothing.

Had a secular historian written the history of Saul, he would have declared that this king reigned forty years over Judea, since, in point of fact, the sun completed forty circuits of the zodiac while Saul held the scepter of that kingdom. But Scripture, which measures years by merit rather than by months, declares that he ruled the people of Israel for only two years, because it was only for two years that he lived a holy life: he reigned two years over Israel. If you ask a worldly man what he thinks of a courtier who has grown old at court, or a merchant who has spent his life in trade, he will tell you they have lived long, that they have worked hard. If you ask instead a man versed in the maxims of the Gospel, he will tell you they have lived very little, and have done nothing at all. To be able to say truly that a man acts, he must act in a manner befitting his true condition. We possess not merely existence, which obliges us only to act; we possess not merely reason, which obliges us only to act reasonably. We possess, further, faith, which obliges us to act as Christians—that is, in keeping with the fact that we are creatures, men, and Christians all at once. To labor at everything else, giving no thought to one's

salvation, is to labor merely as a human being, or, at best, reasonably—but it is not to labor as a Christian; it is simply to be idle. It is to a dying man that I would wish to put this question. The moment of death is far better suited to judging things soundly than is the whole span of life. This present life, says Tertullian, is a time of sleep. The soul lies, as it were, asleep within the body. It begins to awaken as it draws near to leaving the body, and it is perfectly awake once death has separated it from the body entirely. The thoughts of a sleeping man are exceedingly confused; he does not reason; he dreams. These same thoughts grow clearer as one begins to awaken, and they attain all the certainty and clarity of which they are capable once one is fully awake. Thus, my brothers, we judge very poorly of things during the course of life. We judge a little better as we draw near to death, and we judge perfectly once death has come. But since we have no dealings whatsoever with the dead, we can turn for the resolving of our doubts only to the dying; and I was right to say that it is to one of them I would wish to put the question, whether it is not to be idle to labor at any business other than one's own salvation. Let us suppose that the man to whom I addressed myself, absorbed in great worldly affairs, had given very little thought to his own salvation.

Alas, he would tell us, I have done nothing; I have labored for my children, for my family, for my friends; I have won great glory, I have held important positions, I leave behind great wealth. But since none of this will remain to me within a few moments, I begin to understand—alas, far too late—that, having done nothing for myself and for my own salvation, I have, in truth, done absolutely nothing at all. Ah, could I but recall the time I have wasted! Occupied with my salvation, I would have neglected everything else, or I would have done everything else only insofar as it bore upon my salvation.

Say to yourselves, my brothers, what this man would say to you, and do what he would wish he had done. Let yourselves be persuaded by the fine maxim of

Saint Augustine, that one does not live usefully within time unless one uses time to gain merit by which to live in eternity. This is not to say that it is wrong to occupy oneself with the affairs proper to this present life. It is a duty; it is a necessity. But if these affairs bear no relation to the one truly important business we have, then it is in vain that we labor: every man is surely disturbed in vain, says the royal Prophet. All of us, or very nearly all, are idle. The wicked travel a great distance, and in the end make no progress whatsoever: the way of the wicked shall perish. The just man takes a different path altogether. Never idle, he performs a great number of holy and virtuous actions, and if he is obliged to perform ordinary ones as well, he refers them all to the glory of God. If he had engaged in great intrigues in the world, he would have taken very little care for his own salvation. Alas, he would say to us, I have done nothing; I labored for my children, for my family, for my friends; I acquired great glory, I held important offices, I leave behind great possessions. But since none of this will remain to me in a few moments, I begin to realize—alas, too late—that having done nothing for myself and for my own salvation, I have in truth done nothing at all. Ah, if only I could recall the time I have wasted! Had I been occupied with my salvation, I would have neglected everything else, or I would have done everything else only in relation to my salvation.

Say to yourselves, my brothers, what this man would say to you, and do what he would wish he had done. Let yourselves be persuaded by that beautiful maxim of Saint Augustine, that one does not live usefully in time unless one uses time with a view to eternity. This is not to say that it is forbidden to occupy oneself with the affairs of this life. It is a duty; it is a necessity. But if these affairs bear no relation to the one truly important business we have, then it is in vain that we labor: every man is disquieted in vain, says the Prophet King. All of us, or nearly all, are idle. The wicked travel a long road, and in the end they have made no progress: the way of the

wicked shall perish. The just man takes a different course. Never idle, he performs a great number of holy and virtuous actions, and if he is obliged to perform ordinary ones, he refers them to the glory of God. Whenever you ask him what he is doing, he can always answer that he is working for his salvation. And so he will receive a glorious reward. Amen.

ANOTHER EXORDIUM FOR THE SAME SERMON

"Why do you stand here idle all day long?" (Matthew 20.)

To belong to God, to be his possession, his inheritance, his vineyard, his beloved vineyard—is there anything more glorious, my brothers? To cultivate this vineyard ourselves; to be able, with the help of grace, to prune it, to make it fruitful, and to expect from our labor a precious reward—is there anything sweeter? Christians are called to this glorious work, and are at once the vineyard and the vinedressers of the Lord. Go, he tells them, and labor in my vineyard. He says this to all Christians, and he says it to them at every hour, from the first hour of the day to the last, from the moment of our birth to that of our death. So binding an obligation as this ought to banish from Christianity all sloth, all languor. One should see there only fruitful vines, only industrious laborers, and yet, my brothers, one sees there only vines run wild, only idle workers—a fatal idleness that angers God against his vineyard, that compels him to destroy it, to uproot it; an idleness condemned in the Gospel, and which I undertake to combat in this discourse.

To do so successfully, let us turn to Mary, whom the angel found holily and earnestly occupied, when he said to her: Hail, and so forth.

SERMON ON SLANDER

"The scribes and Pharisees murmured, saying, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15.)

Who would have believed that a virtue so radiant and so exemplary, a goodness so beneficent and so magnificent, a power so absolute and so far-reaching as that of the Son of God, would not stand above every blow of the most cunning detraction? Yet it was not so, my brothers. Throughout the whole course of his public life, the Savior never ceased to be the target of the malicious jealousy of the scribes and Pharisees, who labored to misrepresent all his intentions, in order to rob him of a glory they could not look upon without the deepest resentment. Let us cite but a single example. Jesus seeks out the company of sinners in order to win them by the all-powerful attractions of his grace, and it is—strange thing—the occasion of this boundless charity that draws upon him the most injurious suspicions, the most unjust murmurings, and causes him to be regarded as a defiled and impure man.

Alas, that the perfidy of the Jews should still find imitators among Christians, and that slander should daily work its saddest ravages! It is this vice of slander, my brothers, that I undertake to combat in this discourse. To inspire in you all the horror it deserves, I wish to depict it exactly as it is. I shall therefore make known to you its enormity, I shall unveil its stratagems, and I shall refute its pretexts. Spirit of truth, animate my tongue, that it may show slanderers the wicked use they make of their own. Teach me to speak, that I may teach them to be silent. Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT

It is from the Spirit of God that we must learn the true nature of things. To him alone belongs the forming of just judgments. Blind in our understanding,

limited in our knowledge, corrupt in our judgments, we almost always fall short of the mark, or overshoot it. We fail and we exceed in almost everything; we say too much or too little, and nature itself nearly always escapes our grasp. It is for this reason that, in the weighty matter of the vice whose enormity I have resolved to make known to you, I wished, before examining it in itself, to set before you in part the character that the Spirit of truth has given it in the sacred books. The apostle Saint James excelled on this subject; his testimony will suffice for us.

The tongue of the slanderer, he tells us, is a devouring fire, a world of iniquity, a restless evil, a source full of deadly poison. It is a devouring fire whose fury is pitiless, which creeps even into the bowels of the earth to reach what survives only in the memory of men, which goes to stir up vile ashes, shut away beneath the horrors of the tomb, in search of slight faults that the Lord has already forgiven: a devouring fire indeed. It is a secret pride which, making the actions of our brothers the object of our censure, strikes a mortal blow at their reputation. It is a hatred all the blacker for not declaring itself openly, an unworthy treachery that praises to one's face and blames behind one's back, a cold-blooded cruelty that can never find its excuse, a pernicious scandal, a cruel injustice that robs a brother of what he holds most precious: a restless evil indeed. It is a vice that destroys societies, that kindles wars among kingdoms, that throws states into turmoil, that sows discord in families, that arms brother against brother, friend against friend, husband against wife. It is the crime of princes as much as of private persons, of the coarse as much as of the refined: a world of iniquity indeed.

Finally, the tongue of a slanderer is full of deadly poison. His words are always envenomed; his speech kills, and even his silence wounds: full of deadly poison indeed.

Take care, then, never to slander one another, adds the same apostle Saint James; for he who thus wounds his brother wounds the law itself. But let us now leave these general expressions and consider slander in itself. Let us say, to bring out its full enormity, that it is contrary to reason and to religion, to the honorable man and to the good Christian. It is contrary to the honorable man. Everyone agrees that the qualities of an honorable man are generosity and integrity. Now, I maintain that nothing more directly opposes these two qualities of the honorable man than slander. It opposes generosity, since nothing is more cowardly than this vice; and it opposes integrity, since nothing is more unjust. That slander is by nature cowardly, Saint Jerome observed when he said that if there is pleasure in slandering, there is no heart in it, since slander can spring only from a base jealousy of another's merit and a mistrust of one's own; it can therefore only be a meanness of soul and a shameful cowardice that leads us to seek in the disadvantage of our brothers what we cannot find in our own resources. God once forbade in Leviticus, not merely as an injustice but as an inhumanity, that anyone curse a deaf man or set a stumbling-block before a blind man. Do deafness and blindness enjoy some privilege that other bodily defects would not? No, answers Saint Gregory. But just as it was forbidden to curse a deaf man and to set a stone before a blind man—because the one, unable to hear what was said of him, could not answer to justify his conduct, and the other, lacking the use of sight, could not perceive the snare laid for him—so too, says this great pope, it is cowardly and unworthy to unleash oneself against absent persons who are in no position to defend themselves or to clear themselves of what is charged against them: to slander a man behind his back is to speak ill of one who is absent. Yes, it is shameful to do what those false friends of Job did, who in his presence lamented his misfortune, and who, once away from him, tore him apart with cruel slanders: when I had withdrawn from them, they spoke against me. It is shameful to strike in secret, to blame in whispers what one

praises in public, and this, says the Prophet, is the shameful cowardice of the slanderer: that they might shoot in secret at the upright of heart. I say further that slander is incompatible with the natural integrity of an honorable man. This is a maxim that learning has not taught us, but which we have drawn from the very depths of nature, and which reason alone and plain good sense have dictated to us: never to do to another what we would not wish done to ourselves. This principle belongs to the common law of nations; it is the very foundation of republics and states, and were it once overturned, the world would no longer be a reasonable society but a dreadful scene of brigandage. Now, I maintain that of all crimes there is none more opposed to this noble maxim than slander. It is not merely a theft, a robbery, but, in the very words of Scripture, a kind of murder whose effects are more fatal than death itself: heavier than death. Indeed, riches, pleasures, honors, and dignities perish at death; but the reputation that slander attacks is immortal. In this sad shipwreck, where everything human perishes for us, it saves for us a portion of life, which it snatches, so to speak, from the violence of death, and it is, says an ancient Father, the only possession left to the dead: fame is the sole possession of the dead. This is why the Holy Spirit urges us to guard it carefully, and why the apostle Saint Paul, so humble in all things, rises up only to defend his own reputation, which was so necessary to him for the successful exercise of his apostolic office. All these reasons, which mark for us the excellence of the good attached to reputation, show us at the same time the injustice and the enormity of slander. For, according to Saint Thomas, the greater the good taken from a person, the greater the injury done to him: the greater the good that is taken away, the greater the harm. And the injustice is all the greater because the loss of reputation often brings in its train the ruin of families and the destruction of temporal goods. What, for instance, will become of that young woman against whose chastity you have vomited your slanders, which, like a contagious plague, have spread through the

neighborhood and beyond? Where will she find a match suited to her condition? What will become of that clergyman, that religious, whom you have unjustly made out to be an intemperate man, a cheat, an infamous person? What good can he still do among people who believe him to be such? What will become of that merchant whom you have made out to be a thief, a man of bad faith in his trade? If that young woman is left unmarried, or if her husband treats her badly; if that religious or that clergyman is mistreated by his superiors, despised, no longer able to do good among souls; if that merchant loses his credit and his business collapses—and if all these misfortunes are the fruit of your slander—how great is your injustice! Had you plunged a dagger into their hearts, would you have treated them more cruelly than by making them outlive their dishonor and their misery? An injustice all the more deserving of our tears in that almost no one takes it upon himself to repair it. To do so, you would have to retract, to recant, to appear before the public as an impostor yourself. Will you do it? And who has ever done it? Yet it must be done; there is no confessor who can dispense you from it, and if you do not do it, your sin is unforgivable, and your slander becomes all the more enormous the more stubbornly you persist in your injustice. It is no less contrary to religion. We have nothing, says Saint Bernard, more sacred in Christianity than charity. Now, the slanderer first of all attacks the love of God; for can the Spirit of God, who is truth itself, take pleasure in those envenomed tongues that utter nothing but falsehood? Can that spirit of peace and gentleness be reconciled with the venom and bitterness of that serpent? And since, according to the teaching of Saint John, whoever says he loves God and does not love his brother deceives himself, is self-seduced, and does not love God, is it not beyond doubt that slander, which pitilessly tears our brothers apart, is utterly opposed to the love of God? As for the love of neighbor, darkness is no more opposed to light than slander is opposed to it. If you doubt this, my brothers, consult Saint Paul when he describes the

character of charity. Charity, he tells us, is kind; it bears all things; it is not easily provoked. Slander is cruel, fierce; it can bear nothing and rages against everything. Charity conceals the neighbor's fault and grieves over it in secret; slander delights in it, and when it dares, proclaims it in broad daylight. Charity turns everything to good and forgives all; slander, that cruel viper, goes rummaging in hearts to condemn even the most secret intentions, when actions themselves offer it no hold. It goes so far as to dig up the dead from their tombs, to find in their ashes something to reproach the living.

Can there be, my brothers, a blacker malice, a more enormous crime? And so God threatens with the direst calamity those who are guilty of it, and this is what completes our understanding of its enormity. You have made your tongue, says the Prophet, a sharpened razor to wound and tear the reputation of your brothers. Well then, Lord, what will become of them? You shall be destroyed, exterminated, brought to nothing. You shall be torn from the land of the living to be transplanted into that of the dead; and this shall be the just punishment of your sin. Elsewhere he says: Your mouth has been fruitful in malice. You have revealed, without charity, the faults of your brothers. You have judged and condemned them without mercy. A day will come when your own disgraceful deeds will be cast back at you. They will be laid bare before the whole world. They will be unrolled before your eyes, to your utter confusion. You will be judged and condemned all the more severely, the more pitiless you have been toward your brothers: Your mouth has overflowed with malice… I will accuse you and set your sins before your face. Judge now, my brothers, of the enormity of slander. Contrary not only to religion but also to generosity and integrity, those qualities essential to the honorable man, it is a crime that God punishes with the ultimate penalty. This is what makes known its enormity. Let us now unveil its stratagems, and refute its pretexts.

SECOND POINT

Slander is a kind of monstrous sin, containing within its nature something almost incomprehensible. It is at once odious and appealing. That it ought to fill every reasonable person with horror, what I have already said proves well enough. And yet, my brothers, who would believe it? Everyone is infected with it. Of all the diseases of the soul, there is scarcely one more universal or more deeply rooted. Nothing is more to the taste of Adam's unhappy children. It is the seasoning, the amusement of society, the pastime of wits. Is some party of pleasure got up? It is slander that gives it its relish. Does the conversation flag? Some unfortunate person must supply the subject; and when one cannot destroy a reputation with the tongue, one tears it apart with libelous pamphlets. In short, what history tells of those men who devoured one another, slander verifies to the letter. Common as this vice is, there is nothing, says Saint Chrysostom, more artful or more difficult to unmask. Slanderers are not always coarse, given to violent outbursts and brutal insults. To slander in that manner, people say, is to fling oneself too violently upon a neighbor's reputation, to tear it apart without pity, to murder one's brother inhumanly. What, then, does the slanderer do who wishes to wound more delicately and to kill with greater refinement? His crafty tongue skillfully combines its attacks and poisons subtly beneath the very barbs it sharpens. It is impossible to uncover in detail every stratagem of slanderers. I content myself, with Saint Bernard, to distinguish two kinds: those who slander out of pretended compassion, and those who slander by silence. Let us examine each in turn. There are hypocrites and false devotees who are all the more to be feared because their slander wears the appearance of compassion and charity. You will see, says Saint Bernard in one of his sermons on the Canticles, you will see people who, after heaving deep sighs, their faces clouded with a show of sadness, begin in a plaintive voice, as though reluctantly, a poisoned discourse. You would think it was a friend grieving over the misfortune of a

friend. A modest air, eyes languidly raised, play out the tragedy most agreeably. The wound about to be uncovered is gently rubbed, and while a trembling hand conceals the very instrument that is about to make the incision, they lament the patient who is to suffer it. ‘I am in despair,’ one will say, ‘for this is a person for whom I have great affection. I left nothing undone to persuade him to a different course of conduct, but I have wasted my time and my trouble.’ ‘I have known for a long time,’ says another, ‘what I am about to tell you. It was not my doing that the matter was not buried in eternal silence; but since another has already spoken, it would be useless for me to hold my tongue. I say it with sorrow—it is the truth—he did commit this fault.’ Often a murderous discourse opens with the most flattering preface; deadly praises that serve only to envenom the wound: the voice of a lamb and the office of a wolf. ‘This man,’ they say, ‘is one of the most honorable men in the world, one of the most obliging, one of the most generous—but he is to be pitied for this weakness of his.’ ‘It must be granted, there is no merit to compare with that lady's. To an agreeable wit, to a gracious manner, she joins an incomparable fund of goodness. It is true she is a little proud and haughty, she loves display and various small dealings that do set people talking. But that, after all, is the way of persons of her rank.’ ‘That magistrate has a fine reputation, and certainly he deserves it. He is honest, affable, generous, spending freely without becoming a burden to his friends. Yet it is known that he has no great fortune; there is some appearance that he exploits certain profitable perquisites, and makes more of his office than it can rightly yield him. But no one is perfect in this world; he has this weakness, as many others do, without ceasing on that account to pass for a very honest man.’ ‘That other man is capable, upright, disinterested, of irreproachable equity and virtue. But he has greatly changed his ways. Those who knew him formerly are astonished, and rightly so. He is now making up, by late virtues, for the disorders of his past life.’ ‘I am quite willing to tell you this affair,’ says one,

‘but on condition that you speak of it to no one, and that it remain a secret between you and me; for one must not dishonor this person, one must have charity, one must spare his reputation.’ A cruel stratagem, a ridiculous and extravagant precaution, says Saint Chrysostom. You wish those to whom you disclose another's vice to spare his reputation, and you do not spare it yourself! When you were master of your own secret, you did not keep it, and yet you persuade yourself that those to whom you have told it will keep it! Oh, may hell, cries the Prophet, devour those treacherous tongues that make their brothers' reputations bleed: let the wicked be ashamed and be brought down to hell; let deceitful lips be silenced. It is not even necessary, continues Saint Bernard, to open one's mouth in order to slander; a studied silence can perform this cruel office just as well. By speaking at the wrong moment, one might betray one's feelings unwisely. Prudence, then, dictates silence: thus one prevents slander, and stops it at the outset. What greater refinement of malice, my brothers! One who ought to rejoice at speaking or hearing good spoken of his brothers seems instead to disavow it by a cold and gloomy impassivity. One who ought to close his ears to malicious detractions seems instead to license them by his silence; or if it happens that someone speaks, instead of repelling the slander, he contents himself with saying, in a devout tone: ‘He is to be pitied; we must pray to God for him.’ Such, my brothers, is the language of those who slander devoutly. There is slander even in their prayers, and vengeance even in their pardon. Their silence is no less murderous than their tongue, and they possess the secret of ruining their brothers' reputation while making it a point of honor to spare them: his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Such are the stratagems of slander. It remains only for us to refute its pretexts. However great the horror that religion inspires in us against slander, it is surprising how many excuses are alleged to justify it once it has been committed. People readily admit, in general, that it is a monstrous sin; but when it comes to descending into particulars, where they

might recognize themselves, they do not apply to themselves the portrait that is drawn. It seems to the slanderer that his sin is being exaggerated, that people use toward him a method rather like the one he himself employs to magnify the faults of his neighbor, and that, by an exaggeration of language, people slander slander itself. Let us then lift, once and for all, this fatal blindfold that prevents him from recognizing himself; let us show him the vanity of his pretexts. I reduce them to two: the triviality of the faults, and the notoriety of the offense. The supposed triviality of the fault. The faults of my neighbor that I have revealed, you say, are trivial and do not ruin his reputation. Would you have found these faults so trivial had they been charged against you yourself? Why do you use one weight for your brothers and another for yourself? Everything is light where your brother is concerned, and everything is weighty where you yourself are concerned: differing weights are an abomination to the Lord. But even if such slanders were trivial in themselves, are they trivial with regard to the person slandered? Perhaps it is against a minister of the Lord that you aim your sharpened darts. His reputation is more delicate; it can be tarnished by what would only lightly touch many others. It is bound up with the reputation of the whole clergy. In defaming one member, you defame the entire body. If one slanders an artisan, a merchant, a gentleman, the blow struck at their reputation stops at them alone, wounds them alone. But if one slanders a clergyman—accusing him, for instance, of concealing an improper attachment beneath a modest and regular bearing—the dishonor rebounds upon his fellow clergy, and most clergymen come to be regarded as nothing but hypocritical and dissolute men. It is true, O my God, that your ministers sometimes carry with them weaknesses deserving of blame. But, my brothers, these weaknesses—which ought to be the occasion of your tears and your compassion rather than of your satire and your mockery—do these weaknesses strip them of their sacred character? Does not that character, beneath these clouds, remain forever the

same, forever holy, forever worthy of respect? They may totter like the Ark, for the strongest virtue does not always sustain itself equally. But God is displeased when a rash Uzzah presumes to set it right. And so he has, at all times, avenged in a terrible and striking manner these sacrilegious slanders, even the slightest of them, which today would be dismissed as trifles. Thus Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed alive by the earth, and two hundred and fifty of their accomplices consumed by fire, for having spoken ill of Moses. Thus, for the same crime, the Israelites were cruelly tormented by serpents. Miriam, the sister of Moses, was struck with leprosy and cut off from the people for having lightly touched her brother's reputation. Forty-two little children were devoured on the spot by bears for having mocked the sparse hair of a prophet. A wicked king saw himself perish, he and all his posterity, for having turned into ridicule the prophecy of the man of God. Yet most of these were, in your eyes, mere trifles and light slanders. But God does not intend that those whom he honors should become the laughingstock of sinners. To touch their reputation is to touch the apple of his eye. The other pretext you use to justify your slanders is public notoriety. Everyone knows it, you say; everyone is talking about it. What harm do I do in speaking of it along with the rest? What harm, my brothers? Do you not, at the very least, most often wound charity? What! Because everyone has turned against your brother, does that give you leave to finish his ruin?

When the Jews came in a crowd to accuse the woman taken in adultery before Jesus Christ, the Savior kept a profound silence, and to confound those rash tongues, he said: Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone at her. This, my brothers, is what I would wish to be observed whenever it is a question of speaking of one's neighbor. The fault of this person has become public, everyone speaks of it. Very well: let him who is without sin cast the first stone, let him speak the first word against her; if there is nothing that can be laid to your charge, speak boldly—let him without sin, and so

forth. Everyone speaks of her fall, you say. You are more fortunate than she, in that no one speaks of yours; but are you any more innocent for that? The world believes you more virtuous; but does God, who searches the depths of hearts, judge as men do? Once again, everyone speaks of her fall—yes. But how do you know it is not a false report? So many false reports pass for true in this world! Are such examples so impossible? Are they not found in every age, every place, among every kind of person? Did not two judges of Israel falsely swear that they had found the chaste Susanna in adultery? Do not the Jews accuse Jesus Christ, calling him now a Samaritan, now a seducer of the people, now an enemy of Caesar?

But granted, if you insist, that your brother has indeed committed the fault charged against him—how do you know he has not amended his life? How do you know that since his fall he has not risen again through sincere penance? How do you know that secret tears, continual prayers, bitter repentance have not already atoned for the very crime you reproach him with? Grace does not always need years to bring about a conversion; there are victories that cost it but a single instant. How important it is, then, my brothers, for you to be sparing in speaking of your neighbor's faults! For you have seen that slander is an enormous sin, full of malice and without excuse. May you enter into the sentiments of the Prophet King, and say with him: Yes, my God, my resolve is taken; I will so order my ways that I shall sin no more with my tongue. Set, O Lord, a guard upon my lips, to hold back all that you command me to keep within my heart. Let prudence and circumspection stand forever as a door before my mouth, to close it against all that might wound my brothers. May this tongue, O my God, which you have so often sanctified by the touch of your adorable body, never again be profaned by speech contrary to charity. You gave me this tongue only that I might praise you and lead others to bless you together with me. Grant, Lord, that it may never be loosed

except for this purpose, so that, having blessed and praised you in time, we may be glorified in eternity. Amen.

ON SCANDAL

"Blessed is he who shall not be scandalized in me."
(Matthew 11.)

It is surprising, my brothers, that the Son of God, all of whose actions were holy, should have feared to be an occasion of scandal to the Jews. To preach a heavenly doctrine, to convert sinners, to restore sight to the blind, to make the lame walk, to heal the paralyzed, to raise the dead—is this, then, a just cause for scandal? Surely not. Yet the Jews were scandalized by it; but this scandal arose from the perversity of their own hearts, not from the holiness of Christ's actions. It was a scandal taken, but not given, by the Son of God. It is not so with us, my brothers. Since our actions are full of faults and imperfections, since they are sinful and disorderly, they commonly furnish our brothers with just occasion for scandal—a scandal that springs as much from the wickedness of our actions as from the corruption of their hearts, a scandal not only taken on their part but also given on ours, and for which we must answer to God.

Yet there is nothing about which people form more mistaken notions. Some regard this sin as a matter of little importance, for which they will not have to answer before God. Others, persuading themselves that a person guilty of scandal is nothing less than an outright atheist or professed libertine, believe that such people are not so numerous, and that since they themselves do not go to such excesses, they are not of that number. Two errors, my brothers, which I shall refute with two opposing truths. Nothing is so common as scandal—this is the first truth; and therefore it is false to persuade oneself that the number of the guilty is small. Nothing does greater outrage to Jesus Christ, or is more opposed to him, than scandal—this is the second truth; and therefore it is false to say that it is a sin of little importance for which one

need not answer before God. In a word, the frequency of scandal and the enormity of scandal shall be, my brothers, the subject of this discourse and the object of your attention. Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT

What is this scandal of which I speak? It is, in the language of theology, a word or an action which, given the weakness of those who witness it, is of itself capable of leading them into sin: a word or a deed, as Saint Thomas says, that furnishes an occasion of ruin. It is not always necessary, this holy doctor adds, that the action be evil or criminal in itself; it is enough that it bear some appearance of evil, and that, being made public, it lead others into sin.

I say, first, that this sin is very common, and to prove it I advance the following: first, it reigns in every class and condition of life; second, it spreads with great ease and ceases only with great difficulty; and finally, it is all the more common because no one believes himself obliged to avoid it. Let us take these in turn. It reigns in every walk of life. Follow me through the account I am about to give. I ascend first to the very heights of heaven. There I see Lucifer, by his example and his scandalous solicitations, dragging a third part of the angels into his rebellion and his ruin. I descend to earth, to the purest and holiest age that ever was. There Eve succumbs to the serpent's false persuasions; Adam, to the example and urging of his wife. I move forward through the following ages. The earth is flooded by a universal deluge to put a stop to the horrible scandals of mankind, and scarcely have the waters withdrawn when, among the small number that God had preserved, there arose one guilty of scandal, who incited his brothers to mock, as he did, their father's nakedness. The most flourishing of kingdoms is overwhelmed with disasters because of the scandals of its king, though he was otherwise a prince after God's own heart. Among the college of the apostles there arises a scandalous Judas, who tempts the Jews with his offer and induces them to

consent to the betrayal he is plotting. In short, is there any community, however holy and however devout, in which there is not always some scandalous, lax member who, by bad example, draws his brothers into his own disorders and relaxations? Now, if the college of the apostles, with Jesus Christ himself at its head; if the court of a holy king; if the family of a patriarch; if the earthly paradise; if heaven itself have not been free of scandal, how much more, then, must it reign today in the courts of princes, in armies, in cities, in the countryside, in taverns and profane places where libertinism is fashionable, where crime is honored and virtue despised, where one would be ashamed not to appear as guilty as everyone else? If it is found even in the holiest congregations, how much more in the societies of the world, among so many libertines and worldly men and women, whose criminal conduct is like a contagious air that corrupts whatever is purest and most innocent among Christians? Scandal everywhere, my brothers. Scandal among the nobility. It is that officer who draws his friends into his private quarrels to support a grievance or avenge an affront. It is that gentleman who, by his unjust exactions, drives wretched dependents to despair and to pour out a thousand curses. It is that lady who sacrifices everything to her ambition and her vanity, who scandalizes an entire town by her extravagance and her luxury. Scandal at the bar. It is that judge who, given over to publicly known passions, leaves the way open to all who would seek to seduce and corrupt him. It is that lawyer, that attorney, who fosters divisions in order to keep lawsuits alive or to stir up new ones.

Scandal within families. It is that husband who, by his debauchery, drives his wife to impatience and to deadly resentment. It is that wife who, by her coquetry and her ill humor, provokes her husband to fits of rage and dreadful oaths. It is those children, those servants, who, by their want of respect and obedience, give continual occasion for anger to their parents, to their masters and mistresses. Scandal among the common people. It is that merchant who

draws his associates into monopolies and usurious contracts, who sells and teaches others to sell with false weights and false measures, who conceals the defects of his goods in order to deceive buyers. They are those workmen, those painters, those sculptors who produce works that offend modesty and defile the imagination. They are those authors of plays, of novels, and of so many bad books contrary to the faith and to good morals. It is that impious man who boasts openly of his past debauchery, who mocks holy things, and who ceaselessly cries out against bigotry and hypocrisy in order to discredit true devotion. Scandal among the young. It is that libertine who, by his words and his importunities, seduces and corrupts that young girl. It is that worldly woman who, by her contrivances, her studied dress, her affected tenderness of manner, her borrowed beauty, and above all by her shameless immodesty of dress, spreads everywhere the odor of corruption, serves as the devil's instrument to kindle in every heart the impure fire of lust, and delivers up to him more souls than Jesus Christ saves by the power of his precious blood. This, says Tertullian, is the broadest gate of hell: you are the gateway of the devil. Scandal among those in authority. It is that magistrate who is nothing but a buffoon, a grafter. It is that father who is a drunkard, a blasphemer, a man given to oaths and to vengeance. It was his duty to train his children in the practice of religion, and it is he who, by his bad example, corrupts them. It is that idolatrous mother who, out of foolish infatuation or weak indulgence, introduces her daughters into worldly gatherings of mixed company, to balls, to gambling, to dancing, under pretext of entertaining them and showing them fashionable society. She ought to have raised them, in their own persons, to be handmaids of God and brides of Jesus Christ, and she is cruel enough to make of them victims of Satan, slaves to worldly vanity instead. It is that master, that mistress, who makes their servants witnesses, instruments, and accomplices of their wrongdoing, employing them in offices which the respect due to this audience and to this pulpit forbid me to describe to you in their full

indignity—an abominable scandal for which I might a hundred times over cry out: Woe to that man; woe to that master, to that mistress. It is that clergyman who, honored with the most sacred character and engaged in the holiest functions of the priesthood, profanes them by a worldly and secular life, not to say an impure and licentious one, and casts shame upon his very state and ministry. He ought to have been, according to Jesus Christ, the salt of the earth, and it is through him that the earth grows corrupt. He ought to have been the light of the world, and he shines only to expose to the world faults that ought to make him blush. He ought to be—and indeed he is—that city set upon a hill, and he seems raised up to no other purpose than to display, from that height, disorders that throw whole peoples into astonishment and confusion, and that cover him himself with shame and disgrace.

What more shall I say, my brothers? Scandal even among those, men and women, who make public profession of piety. Would you believe it? It is that devout woman who mingles with her devotion the disorder of her passions, the refinement of her vengeance, the false zeal of her self-interest, the intrigues of her ambition, the volatility of her temper, the intemperance of her tongue. Touchy on points of honor, jealous, miserly, slanderous, two-faced, dishonest—she thereby erects a triumph for libertinism and gives it a warrant that authorizes it.

Scandal, finally, all the more common because it is a contagious plague that spreads easily and reaches everywhere in a short time. Nothing, my brothers, is more seductive than bad example. Nature, the world, passion—everything favors it. You commit, in your brother's presence, a bad action that leads him to sin as you have done. He will do the same in another's presence; that one, in turn, will do likewise; so that within a few days, an entire community finds itself infected with the disorder your bad example has caused.

It is thus that Arius, by his false doctrine, infected almost the whole of Christendom. It is thus that the licentiousness of Priscillian corrupted the purity of nearly all the women of his time. It is thus that the scandal of Calvin spread throughout all of France, that of Luther throughout all of Germany, that of Wycliffe throughout all of England and all of Bohemia. It is thus that so many impious customs have crept in among Christians, contrary to the purest maxims of the Gospel; and what completes this misfortune for Christianity is that this accursed plague does not die with those who gave it birth. The scandal of Arius, of Wycliffe, of Luther, of Calvin, and of so many other heretics still endures, and daily makes new disciples. The scandal of Simon the Magician has endured since the first century of the Church, and very often still produces new Simoniacs. The scandal of Absalom still endures, and leads countless children to disrespect their fathers. The scandal of Rabshakeh still endures, and serves as a model for so many impious men who ceaselessly blaspheme the name of God. The scandal of Judas still endures, and daily produces misers, traitors, apostates. The scandal of Herod, the scandal of shameless old men, that of Potiphar's wife still endures, and daily produces countless impure souls.

Your scandal, my brothers—these profane fashions, these impious and worldly maxims that you have introduced among people of your own station—still endures and destroys countless souls. Your scandal, I say, that sin you committed ten, twenty, thirty years ago, and which scandalized your whole parish, perhaps still endures today, and never ceases to be the fatal occasion of the fall of a great number of your brothers. Woe to the world because of its scandals, said the Son of God. He did not say: woe to a few young men of the world, but woe to the world, because the world is full of scandals. After this, is it not surprising that so little attention is paid today to this sin? Is it not surprising, I say, that scandal being so common, so few people believe themselves guilty of it? For after all, who nowadays makes it a

matter of conscience? Who thinks of confessing it? People are ready enough to accuse themselves of the sin they have committed, but do they think of accusing themselves of the sin they have caused, or might have caused, their neighbor to commit? I know there is no lack of excuses on this subject, and this is precisely what makes this sin so common.

'I am not responsible,' people say, 'for the care of my neighbor. I mind my own business; let him mind his.' You are mistaken, my brothers. God has entrusted to each of us the salvation of our brother, and he will demand of us a strict accounting of it: he has given each one charge concerning his neighbor. If the law of charity obliges us to do good to our neighbor, how much more does it oblige us not to do him harm! 'I am only exercising my right; so much the worse for him if he comes to harm.' A mistake once again, my brothers, a popular obstinacy that is truly pitiable. Learn this, then, today: to be guilty of the sin of scandal, it is not always necessary to have the express intention of making your brother sin. It is enough that you perform an action that leads him into sin. Suppose a man—this is an example I take from Scripture—suppose a man who has set fire near a stack of sheaves says: my intention was not that the fire should catch there. He will be no less responsible for the fire he has caused, says the Lord. He will be made to repair the damage he has done: he who kindles the fire shall make restitution for the loss. In the same way, Saint Chrysostom observes, it is wrong for those who give bad example to consider themselves excused by saying that their intention was never to contribute to their neighbor's disorders. It is enough that they have done things capable of ruining him. The Lord will demand of them soul for soul, blood for blood: he who kindles the fire shall make restitution for the loss. You display an improper picture, you lend a licentious book, you sing tender songs suited to inspire a criminal love, you jest with double meanings, you make light of devotion, you turn devout persons into ridicule, you appear in clothing equally opposed to modesty and to Christian

decency. In all this, you do not intend to make your neighbor sin. Yet he sins, and you are responsible for his sin; the Lord will demand an account of it from you: he who kindles the fire shall make restitution for the loss. But, you will say to me, perhaps the action I perform, at which my neighbor takes scandal, is a good action, or at least an indifferent one. Am I, then, responsible for his sin? In that case, you ought, if you can, to suspend it for a time, or at least to make known the uprightness of your intention, and why this action is permitted to you, so that no bad impression may remain. But if, without taking these wise precautions, you proceed regardless, out of a cruel indifference to your brother's weakness, you are guilty of scandal, and all the more cruel in that you have shown less pity for a brother whom you know to be weak and infirm. For, after all, my brothers, not everything that is lawful is always edifying, says Saint Paul, and an action ceases to be lawful the moment it becomes an occasion of scandal: all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things build up. Was it not, after all, a matter of indifference to eat meat? Yet the Apostle declares that if by doing so he should scandalize his brother, he will never eat meat again. Is it not against precisely this kind of scandal—the scandal of the weak—that God pronounces this curse: whoever causes one of the least of my faithful to sin deserves to be drowned in the depths of the sea?

Undeceive yourselves, then, my brothers, and recognize the truth I stated at the outset, that scandal is very common, and that very few Christians are free of it. Recall those for whom you yourselves are guilty of it, and lament it before God; for of all crimes it is one of the most enormous.

SECOND POINT

Jesus Christ, being God as his Father is, is no less just and holy than he. He is, indeed, holiness and justice by his very essence. Everything opposed to him is impure; everything he punishes is criminal. Now, of all sins, none is

more opposed to Jesus Christ, none does he threaten with more rigorous punishment, than scandal; from which I conclude that it is one of the most enormous of all sins. The most grievous outrage a subject can offer his prince is when, forgetting his condition as a subject, he takes up arms against him, joins the party of his enemies, deprives him of his most faithful vassals, opposes his undertakings, overturns his designs, and pursues him even to death. This, my brothers, is the crime committed by one who causes scandal, and this is the enormity of the outrage he commits against Jesus Christ, his sovereign. For indeed, what has Jesus Christ done, and what does the one who causes scandal do? Driven by an ardent desire to save all mankind, Jesus Christ came forth from the bosom of his Father, came down upon the earth, exposed himself to the cruelest sufferings, endured the most shameful death, and won for himself, at the price of his blood, the title of Savior of the world. What does one who causes scandal do, who, by his words and actions, plunges his brothers into sin and damnation? Does he not rob Jesus Christ of the conquests he has won over the devil? Does he not overturn all the designs of this Man-God concerning the salvation of mankind? Does he not render his death useless? Does he not rob him of the title of Savior which he acquired at the price of his blood? Does he not, in the end, persecute him more cruelly than the Jews did? For he causes him to die within the hearts of his most faithful followers, in whom he lived and reigned by his grace. But listen above all to the Apostle. Take care, he says, that the liberty you allow yourselves does not become an occasion of falling for the weak. For if one of them sees someone with greater knowledge eating meat sacrificed to idols, will he not be emboldened to eat of it too? And so, by your knowledge, you will destroy your brother who is still weak, and for whom Christ died. Now, in sinning thus against your brothers, and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ himself. On this Saint Chrysostom reasons as follows: there are, he says, in scandal several things that render the one who causes it guilty and

unworthy of pardon. The first is that the one he scandalizes, and causes to die to grace, is weak. The second is that he is his brother. And a third, the most terrible of all, is that he is a brother for whom Jesus Christ died. He does not say, ‘for whom you ought to die,’ but what is far more, ‘for whom Jesus Christ died and shed his blood.’ And what is worse still is that you so despise this precious blood that you cause the death of the very brother for whom it was shed—and this, to satisfy your own sensuality. For the Apostle does not say that it is for your own perfection, to acquire knowledge or virtue, but for your sensuality—for a shameful pleasure, for a trifling interest, for a slight satisfaction. It is with good reason, then, that the Apostle concludes that, sinning thus against your brothers and wounding their still-weak conscience, you sin against Christ himself. Do you see, continues the same Father, how the Apostle gradually leads this crime to the very height of iniquity? And indeed, what greater harm can a Christian do to a brother who is weak; what more grievous outrage against Jesus Christ, who died for him, than to deprive him of the grace that is the life of his soul, and to wrest from his hands that precious blood by which he was redeemed; to subject him to the slavery of the devil, and to plunge him into the same torments deserved by the apostate angels—and all this for a thing of no value? Can the devil himself, with all his malice and all his fury, cause man a greater wrong, or Jesus Christ a more grievous outrage? Thus reasons Saint Chrysostom, following Saint Paul.

What Saint Bernard adds is no less worthy of your attention, and proves no less how opposed scandal is to Jesus Christ. It is evident, says this Father in his first sermon on the conversion of Saint Paul, that to cause scandal and to hinder the salvation of one's neighbor is to persecute the Savior himself, since it is to persecute children of whom he is the father, captives of whom he is the liberator, members of whom he is the head, servants of whom he is the master. This persecution, he adds, is crueler, more injurious to Jesus Christ, than that of the Jews who shed his blood. How can this be? It is, says the same saint,

that the Savior of the world suffered the persecution of the Jews with joy, and gave his life with holy eagerness for the salvation of mankind; whereas he suffers only reluctantly the persecution stirred up against him by those who cause scandal, because it runs contrary to his will and to his purposes for the salvation of the human race. The Jews put Jesus Christ to death when he was still mortal; the one who causes scandal puts him to death in the hearts of the faithful, now that he is immortal. The Jews laid their sacrilegious hands only on the natural body of Jesus Christ; but the one who causes scandal commits his crime against his mystical body, which is the faithful, who are infinitely dearer to him than his own body, since he gave that body over to death for their salvation. Let us conclude, then, with the same Saint Bernard, that scandal appears a more horrible and more grievous sacrilege to Jesus Christ than that of the Jews who crucified him: a truly dreadful sacrilege, one that seems to exceed even the crime of those who laid sacrilegious hands upon the Lord of majesty. Would you ever have thought, my brothers, that scandal was so enormous a crime? You will be still more convinced of it if you consider the threats and curses pronounced against this sin. In the judgment of the Fathers, there is no sin that God punishes more rigorously or pardons more reluctantly. One who causes scandal, says Saint Gregory, deserves as many different punishments as he has given bad examples that lead to ruin: those who spread examples leading to the ruin of others deserve as many deaths as they have propagated. He will indeed suffer them, my brothers; for as many sinners as have been damned on his account, so many torments will he feel in hell. But without seeking further proof, listen only to how the Son of God himself speaks of it.

It is necessary, it is true, that scandals should occur—a necessity of consequence, not an absolute one: woe to that man through whom scandal comes. It would be better for him to have a millstone hung about his neck and to be cast into the depths of the sea. Do you hear this, my brothers, this

anathema from the mouth of him who cannot lie? Woe to you, fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, superiors of every kind, whoever you may be, who set before your children, your servants, and your subordinates examples of vengeance, of oaths, of drunkenness, of ambition, of anger! Oh, would that the sea had swallowed you up beneath its waves when you first entered upon this office, this union, this station in life! Who says this? Your Savior, your God, and your judge says it. Woe to you, licentious youth, who scandalize an entire parish by your debauchery, your impurities, and your vanity! Oh, would that the earth had swallowed you into its depths when you first began to introduce these impious and shameful fashions! Would that your bosom had been struck with leprosy when you had the impudence to bare it! Would that your hand had withered when you laid it upon that creature! Woe to you, whoever you may be, who are an occasion of sin to your brother! It would be better for you to be plunged into the depths of the sea, a millstone about your neck. Yes, says Saint Bernard, I fear to die, because I am not prepared. Yet I would rather die, and abandon myself to the mercy of God, than cause the least of my brothers to stumble. He understood, this great saint, how enormous a sin scandal is, and would to God that you understood it as he did! You would surely then adopt his sentiments, form similar resolutions, and, as docile as Saint Paul was when Jesus Christ reproached him with persecuting himself in the persons of the first faithful, you would say, as that apostle said, and in the same disposition as he: Lord, what will you have me do? Lord, what would you have me do to repair this scandal? You would say, with the same firmness as he: if by eating meat, that is, by the least of my actions – I should scandalize my brother, I will never do it. You would, like him, make your body serve justice for the edification of your brothers, just as you have hitherto made it serve iniquity for their ruin. Pierced with the keenest regret, you would say to God in the bitterness of your heart: Ah, Lord, would that I could restore to you as many souls as I have taken from you!

Would that, by my tears and my sighs, I could draw out of hell those whom I plunged there by my scandals! But alas, all my tears cannot quench their flames. They are damned for eternity, and it is by my fault that they are so. O regret! O sorrow! Take your vengeance upon me, then, O my God, in this life, for the wrongs I have done to you and to my brothers. As for me, I shall never cease to groan, to abase myself in your presence, in the hope of winning you other servants.

Such, I say, would be your feelings and your resolutions, were you convinced of the truths I have just set before you. Ah, Lord, how happy I would count myself, how content I would be, if, after what you have inspired me to preach to my hearers, I could see them suddenly transformed, as ready to edify by the good example of their virtues as they once scandalized by their past discords. But it belongs above all to your grace to work these wonderful effects in their hearts; it belongs to your grace to give the finishing touch to the work you have begun through my feeble ministry. Grant us this grace, Lord; I ask it of you through the infinite merits of your Son, and may it lead us to eternal life. Amen.

SERMON ON THE SPIRITUAL MERCY THAT MUST BE SHOWN TOWARD ONE'S NEIGHBOR

"The Samaritan, seeing him, was moved with compassion, and coming near, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine." (Luke 10.)

It would seem, my brothers, that the Son of Man, in coming into the world, changed the precept of love. When he first gave it to men, he proposed to them, as the rule of the love they owed their neighbor, the love they bore themselves: love your neighbor as yourself. But when he renewed this law in the new covenant of grace, he no longer commanded them merely to love their brothers as themselves; instead, offering himself to them as their model, he commanded them to love one another as he himself had loved them: this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. And it is for this reason, says Saint Isidore of Damietta, that Jesus Christ calls this commandment, ancient as it is, a new commandment. It was an ancient law to love one's neighbor; but it is a new law to love him as Jesus Christ has loved him. Indeed, my brothers, since disorder has crept into the love

we bear ourselves, if we were to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, our love would often be quite disordered. For although we love ourselves to excess, we nonetheless do not always feel enough sorrow for our spiritual falls; we are even sometimes shameless enough to glory in them; or if we hide them, we take no care whatsoever to heal them. Yet is it not a strange disorder not to feel the misfortune of our souls when we inflict death upon them through sin? We weep so often, says Saint Augustine, over the death of the body, which we see, and we almost never weep over the death of the soul, which we do not see. In your judgment, my brothers, would it be loving one's neighbor to treat him so? No. Let us no longer love him merely as ourselves,

for that would be to love him very poorly; let us love him as Jesus Christ has loved him: that you love one another as I have loved you. And how did he love us? This is what is explained in our Gospel. You know that the Samaritan spoken of here represents Jesus Christ. Now, if you look closely, he does three things: he lets himself be moved with compassion for this wretched man he finds lying on the ground; he binds up his wounds; and he pours oil and wine upon them to heal them: he was moved with compassion, and coming near, he bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine—three wonderful circumstances that contain all we owe to our brothers who have fallen into sin, and that teach us to view their faults with compassion, to cover them with love, and to treat them with skill.

FIRST POINT

One would have to have renounced every sentiment inspired by nature, to be ignorant of the promptings of grace, and to be insensible to the movements zeal awakens, in order to look with dry eyes and without emotion upon the falls and disorders of our brothers. Was there ever an object more deserving of pity than a man who, neglecting the care of his salvation, gives himself over to sin and enters upon a course of disorder that will bring about his eternal ruin! He would be less unhappy if fortune, failing to reward his labor, reduced him to extreme poverty. He would be less unhappy if injustice, oppressing his innocence, led him to the scaffold. He would be still less unhappy if his friends, forgetting his services, conspired his ruin and took from him his honor or his life. You could not see him in such a state without compassion; you would feel for his miseries, and unless your heart were made of stone, you would offer his misfortunes some sighs, some words of pity. How, then, can it be that, seeing him more wretched still through his spiritual falls, you remain untouched? Even insensible creatures cease to be insensible when it comes to sharing in the sufferings of other creatures. No star is eclipsed in the heavens

without all the other elements grieving at its misfortune: the elements suffer, says Saint Ambrose, when the stars suffer eclipse. Should men be less moved when they see one of their brothers suffer a cruel eclipse, lose his light, and fall from heaven along with those unfortunate stars which a dragon swept down with its tail and cast upon the earth,

as Saint John relates in the twelfth chapter of his Apocalypse? For that, they would have to have renounced the sentiments that nature inspires—nature, which gave us a heart of flesh only so that it might be more tender and more susceptible to emotion at the sight of misfortunes befalling other men: it would be a stupor, not a tranquility, as Saint Augustine says.

The patriarch Noah had this heart of flesh, this sensitive heart. Scripture notes that when God had made him enter the ark, he shut him in from outside so that he could not go out; and if we are to believe the eloquent Saint John Chrysostom, God took this precaution because this holy man would have died of grief had he, upon opening the door of the ark, beheld the dreadful sight of a world drowned beneath the waters of the flood—guilty though those who perished may have been. A just man is always tender-hearted, says this admirable doctor; the death even of the greatest sinners afflicts and moves him, and Noah would have been overwhelmed by grief had he beheld all mankind buried beneath the waters, after their hundred vain efforts to escape the violence of the flood, to reach the tops of trees or the summits of mountains, which offered them nothing but a tomb, though they believed they had found a refuge there. The state of the sinner is infinitely more deplorable than that of these unfortunates, and whoever can look upon it without sorrow surely does not possess a heart of flesh, since he does not love his brothers: whoever does not love remains in death. I do not know, my brothers, whether you grasp the force of this expression. Ah, how beautiful it is! How mysterious! Death is ordinarily represented

as a frightful specter, as a dreadful skeleton whose body is composed of nothing but bones, without either flesh or heart. Thus, to say that one who does not love remains in death is to say that he has no heart of flesh, none of that tender compassion of which Scripture speaks and which nature has given to other men—the bowels of mercy—but that, on the contrary, he possesses all the hardness and all the insensibility of the bones that form the skeleton of death, in which he makes his dwelling: he remains in death. But why do I linger so long over showing that to lack compassion for our sinning brothers is to have renounced the sentiments of nature? Let us add what should make a still deeper impression on Christian minds: that it is also to be ignorant of the promptings of grace.

Since grace makes of all Christians the members of one same body, it gives them the same sympathy, the same union, the same tenderness that all the parts of our own bodies have among themselves; and this sympathy is so great, says Saint Paul, that if one member suffers, all the others suffer with it: if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If it is the foot that is wounded, the eyes turn toward it and bathe it with their tears, the tongue laments it, the hands hasten to its relief. Even the heart, that small sovereign which might seem exempt from feeling the sufferings of its subjects, grieves over it, shares in it, and sighs over it. Not, says Saint Augustine, that it is wounded by contagion from a wound not its own, but because love persuades it that it

ought to grieve with those who grieve: not through sharing in the disaster, but through the consolation charity brings. Divine charity, which unites all Christians, adorable grace which makes of them one body of which Jesus Christ is the head, do you produce lesser effects than this love which binds together the parts of our bodies? Ah, you produce far greater ones; and it is true that this mutual exchange of goods and ills which love brings about in the

heart is but a figure of what you establish among faithful souls. Listen to one such soul, my brothers; see how he shares in his brothers' sufferings, how he feels all their ills, how he speaks of them with sorrow—I mean the great Apostle, who thus expresses the sentiments of his compassion: If any one of you suffers affliction, is it not shared by me as well? Am I seen to take but a small part in it? Who is weak, that I do not become weak with him? Who is scandalized, that I do not burn—not with the fire of anger, but with the flames of charity, as Saint Anselm explains it? And elsewhere, writing to the Corinthians: God knows, my brothers, what anguish of spirit I have felt, and how many tears I have shed in writing to you: out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears. I knew of your disorders, and when charity guided my pen to turn you from them, I wet with my tears every letter I traced: this is a holy sorrow, and, if it may be said, a blessed misery,

to be troubled by the sins of others without being entangled by them, to grieve without clinging, to be drawn together by sorrow without being drawn by love, as Saint Augustine says. If it is true, my brothers, that tears are the blood of the heart, must not Saint Paul's heart have been deeply moved by the sufferings of his brothers? But I am not surprised at this, since, besides the promptings of grace that he followed, he was moved as well by the impulses of the zeal that animated him.

Zeal is a fire that kindles our hearts with the love of God; and just as fire grows more intense and increases at the approach of water, its opposite, so zeal grows warmer and more animated at the sight of evil, its enemy, because evil is opposed to the glory of God. From this have come the extraordinary effects it produced in men like Jeremiah, David, and Eli. The first wastes himself away in weeping, and complains that his eyes cannot furnish him tears enough to mourn the disorders of a people that had offended God. The second declares that he is seized with horror, that he faints away at the sight of the

wicked who abandon the law of God: horror has seized me because of the wicked who forsake your law; and that his zeal finally consumes him with grief when he thinks that his enemies have forgotten the words of the Lord: my zeal has consumed me. The third was still more deeply moved, and the grief he felt at the capture of the ark was so violent that, unable to bear it, he died on the spot. Would to God, my brothers, that some sparks of the fire that burned in these great men might fly into your hearts! You would no longer be indifferent to the sins of your brothers; their disorders would be your own

grief; and when you saw them stripped of the gifts of grace, covered with wounds, half dead, your very hearts would be moved with compassion, as were those of the charitable Samaritan; and, following his example, you would apply to their wounds, as a first dressing, a bandage—I mean that you would cover their faults with silence, and, far from publishing them, would conceal them with love.

SECOND POINT

It belongs to humility to disclose one's own sins. The early Church made this a rule for its public penitents, and there is no one who does not regard as the fruit of an excellent virtue the work of Saint Augustine's Confessions, in which this incomparable man describes all his disorders and hands them down from age to age, as though he wished to assemble all mankind to instruct them in the errors of his life: compelling the theater of the world, says Saint Basil, speaking of David, to see his sin made public.

But it belongs to charity to cover, beneath the veil of an inviolable silence, the sins of one's neighbor, and to take the utmost care to conceal them from the eyes of others. I know, my brothers, that this reserve required by Christian charity is as difficult as it is necessary. Sin is a burden unbearable to anyone but the heart of the sinner who commits it: even the elements and

insensible things cannot endure it. The earth, unable to bear it any longer in Dathan, Korah, and Abiram, opens its depths to swallow them up. The sea grows troubled, it heaves, when it carries Judas

along with the other apostles; and seeing the fury of its waves, one may easily judge, says Saint Ambrose, that the treachery of this traitor was a weight that seemed unbearable even to that element, insensible and cold as it is: the treachery of the betrayer tossed the ship. But it is certain that sin never weighs more heavily than upon the mind and tongue of a man who has witnessed it committed. Tell me frankly: have you never experienced this, ladies, when you learned that one among you lacked the restraint so becoming to your sex, that she was fond of flattery, that among her acquaintances some suitor had found the art of pleasing her? Did you keep this secret for long, and if you did, how much effort did it cost you? How many times did this matter come back to your mind, and rise as far as your very tongue before it finally escaped you? I do not know whether it is more pleasant to publish the ill one knows of another, or more burdensome to conceal it, but it is certain that such restraint is the fruit of an uncommon virtue.

Yet all the laws of charity oblige us to it. It is not only forbidden to impute falsely an evil that does not exist; it is not even permitted to make known an evil that truly does exist, and we are commanded to hide it beneath the veil of a sacred silence. From this comes that precept of the Gospel: If your brother has sinned against you, point out his fault to him in private, between you and him alone. For it is right, says the incomparable Augustine, to correct in secret what has been committed in secret. The offense must die where it

was committed. It was committed in secret; it must die in secret: what is done in secret should be corrected in secret—where the evil occurs, there let it die, says Saint Augustine. Physicians do not merely make the incision; they

also bind up the wound, says Saint Chrysostom. If you are the only one who knows of it, and you make it known to several others, you do not correct your brother—you betray him: you are not a corrector, but a betrayer, says Saint Augustine. This is also the source of that maxim of Scripture, twice repeated: charity covers a multitude of sins. Hatred and envy seek out faults in order to publish them; charity does not seek them out; but if they present themselves, charity at once covers them with the mantle of zeal, as Isaiah says. And if you object that love, being wholly naked, has no mantle, I would answer that it appears naked only because it has stripped itself in order to clothe others, and to hide their faults beneath its own garments. Do you not recall, on this point, the action of Noah's two sons? Have you not noticed that they used their cloaks to hide their father's nakedness—an excellent figure in which we see at once the fate of a sinner and the differing conduct of the saintly and the wicked toward him? The sinner, intoxicated by pleasure, falls insensibly asleep, loses all care to conceal himself, and imprudently lets his faults be seen. The wicked man, who notices them, makes them a subject of mockery, amuses himself at their expense, and publishes them in the very first company he finds, imitating the bad example of Ham, who mocked his father's nakedness. But the righteous man, imitating the virtue of

Shem and Japheth, uses the mantle of love to hide the sin he knows of, and shuts it up within his own heart, as though to consume it in the fire of the charity that burns within him.

The father of the prodigal son showed toward his son the same charity that these two sons had shown toward their father. His first care was to have a robe brought and to clothe him in it: quickly bring out the robe. He did not wish, says Saint Peter Chrysologus, to let his servants see him in his shameful nakedness. He did not wish others to recognize, in the state of his son's

clothing, the disorder of his life. He did not wish any eyes but his own to perceive, in this repentant son, anything that might make him blush.

But should it not have been more distressing for this son to appear naked before his father's eyes than before the eyes of others? No, my brothers; love sufficiently veiled the father's eyes to keep him from making painful reflections upon his son's nakedness; and since not everyone else shared the same love, it was the father's prudence to prevent them from looking with contempt upon what he himself had looked upon with compassion: only the father could see, and not see, the nakedness of his son.

Finally, to omit nothing that can be said about this mantle of love and this veil of charity, let us add the memorable saying of the great Constantine, reported by the learned Theodoret. This great prince, having thrown into the fire certain written accusations that some bishops at the Council of Nicaea had brought against some of their fellow bishops, crowned

this fine action with these fine words: ‘If I saw a bishop committing a crime, I would cover it with my own royal robe, to hide it from the eyes of the people.’ Admirable sentiments! Ah, why are they not engraved upon the hearts of all the faithful? What a powerful dam you would build against the flood of envy and slander! No longer would one hear, in ordinary conversation, those scandalous accounts of this man's debaucheries or that woman's weaknesses. No one would bring to light deeds that ought to be buried in eternal night; no one would tear apart his neighbor's reputation, or carry it into every drawing room. Peace and charity would be preserved. In short, all the faithful would imitate that good Samaritan, who binds up the wounds he pities: he bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Take care, however: it is not enough to bind up these wounds with charity; they must also be treated with skill.

THIRD POINT

I would call it cruel compassion and pernicious secrecy, if neither were of any real help. What would you think of a man who, watching with sorrow some poor wretch struggling against death in the water, and who, though able to save him by reaching out his hand, remained motionless on the shore, calling no one to his aid, merely to witness his misfortune: what compassion is it to spare him, and let him drown, as Saint Augustine says! Would you not say that such grief is a murderous grief, a dreadful cruelty? Say the same of a Christian who, knowing the faults of

his brothers, feels compassion for them, does not publish them, but neglects to apply the remedy of prudent correction. This negligence is more culpable than many suppose. It causes, first, the ruin of your brother, who was not so far gone that he could not be cured; but he needed a physician: a single word would have sufficed to remind him of his duty; there were still, in his heart, some sparks of the love of God, and a single breath would have rekindled them. It needed only that you reach out your hand; he would have followed you, and he was lost only because he was not helped.

But have you ever truly considered this? Do you know that you are lost along with him, that God will demand of you an account of his blood; and in the same sense that the Fathers have regarded as murderers of the poor who die of hunger those rich men who give them no alms—if you did not feed him, you killed him—so God will regard you as the murderer of that sinner who perished, and whom you did not correct. He will reproach you with his death, because you did not tend his wounds. But how, you will say, is one to go about it? These sorts of corrections are so difficult; so few people bear patiently being reproved, that no one wishes any longer to take it upon himself to reprove others. It is true that prudence is needed, and this is why I tell you that you must treat your brothers' wounds with skill. This skill is indicated in

our Gospel. The oil and the wine that the Samaritan poured upon the wretch's wounds teach us to make a discreet combination of severity and gentleness; and if you ask for a fuller explanation of this mixture, here is how

Saint Augustine himself went about it: ‘I have known a certain murderer; I have not denounced him. I spare his shame, but I take care for his salvation. I speak to him in private: I set before his eyes the judgment of God; I alarm his blood-stained conscience; I urge repentance upon him… There are men who commit adultery within their own households, most often denounced by their jealous wives, who sometimes seek only their husbands' salvation. We do not denounce them, but we reprove them in secret. Take heed, whoever you are who suffer from such a malady: listen not to what your own mind, favoring your sins, tells you, but to what God says—lest you remain bound to your own iniquity, a friend to yourself, or rather your own enemy, and the enemy of your own household. Hear that God judges fornicators and adulterers. You fear to be recorded as someone's enemy, and you do not fear to be judged by God. Where is your faith? The last day of judgment is indeed far off, but the last day of each man's life cannot be considered far off, since life itself is short.’

To reprove without bitterness and without anger will be easy for you, if you consult charity alone: the hottest regions have neither rain nor thunder, because the excessive heat dissipates the vapors. And if you ask me for something more precise, I would say that three things, it seems to me, ought to soften its rigor: a private place, a fitting time, and a courteous manner. By choosing a private place, one spares another's modesty; by choosing the right time, one tempers the passions; by adopting a courteous manner, one forestalls resentment.

It is certain that secrecy must be sought. You must neither neglect your brother's secret nor publish it. To fail to correct him would be to neglect it; to

fail to correct him in private would be to publish it. If you wish this is how Saint Augustine approached the matter: “I know of a certain murderer; I do not betray him, nor do I neglect him. I spare his sense of shame, but I look after his salvation. I speak to him in private: I set God's judgment before his eyes, I strike terror into his blood-guilty conscience, I urge him toward repentance... There are adulterers in their own households who are betrayed to us, usually by jealous wives, sometimes seeking their husbands' welfare. We do not expose them, but we correct them in secret. Take heed, whoever suffers from this sickness: listen to what God says, not to what your own heart tells you in indulgence of your sins, or what a friend bound to you by that same chain of wrongdoing tells you—or rather, an enemy to you and to himself. Listen to the truth that God judges fornicators and adulterers. Are you afraid that an enemy will record your name, and yet unafraid that God will judge you? Where is your faith? The last day of the general judgment is indeed far off, but no man's own last day can be called far off, for life is short.”

To reprove without bitterness and without anger will be easy for you, if you consult nothing but charity: the hottest regions have neither rain nor thunder, because the excessive heat dissolves the vapors. And if you ask me for something more precise, I would say that three things, it seems to me, ought to soften its severity: a private place, a fitting time, and an honest manner. By privacy, one spares a person's shame; by timing, one manages the passions; by adopting an honest manner, one forestalls resentment.

It is certain that secrecy must be sought. You must neither neglect nor publish your brother's fault. To fail to reprove it would be to neglect it; to reprove it without secrecy would be to publish it: “If you rebuke him before everyone, you are not a corrector but a betrayer.” What fruit could such a betrayal bear? None at all. A man, says Origen, who sees that you speak to him and keep his secret, will feel it an honor to correct his fault. But if you

make it public, he will either deny it shamelessly or defend it brazenly; and by either of these two ways he will only increase his sin. Joseph sent the Egyptians from the room, and would not let strangers learn of his brothers' fault: “Spare their shame, intent on their correction.”

Manage the passions by choosing the right time. God let David's affair with Bathsheba continue for the whole time of her pregnancy: “Why did he not correct the sinner at once? Because he saw that his soul was blinded by the very violence of his sin” (Chrysostom). Do the same, my brothers. If your neighbor falls into some grave fault, and you notice that he is rushing headlong, in the first heat of his crime, into further excess, do not correct him then; he is incapable of taking advice. Manage his passion, choose skillfully a convenient time, and finally act, doing so with courtesy. A proud spirit is ill suited to correcting his brothers. It is hard to bear a man who comes bluntly and without preparation to reproach us for our failings. To make correction bearable, it must be preceded by marks of esteem and friendship. An angel physician gives me an excellent illustration of this. He instructs the young Tobias to embrace his father before applying the gall to his eyes: “Kiss him, and then at once anoint his eyes with that gall” (Tobit 11). A charming precaution, and one that agrees with what the great Augustine said:

“Whatever you say with a wounded spirit is the outburst of a punisher, not the charity of one who corrects.”

Finally, to leave nothing out, proportion your correction to the temperament of the person. If your brother has lost all sense of shame, use a severe, forceful, and vigorous reprimand; follow the full impetuosity of your zeal. If his spirit lies somewhere between obstinacy and docility, blend your correction with sweetness and severity at once; be gentle and firm. But if you are dealing with a well-disposed spirit, use nothing but courtesy, and, as Saint

Paul says, employ only a spirit of gentleness: “Instruct such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” Amen.

ANOTHER EXORDIUM FOR THE SAME SERMON

The precept of fraternal correction may be regarded, my brothers, as one of the clearest signs of the hatred God bears toward sin. We would judge a prince to be extraordinarily bent on the ruin of his enemies if he required all his subjects to take up arms, without even excepting women, whom the universal consent of every nation has always exempted from the hardships of war. This is exactly what the Son of God has done: he has declared war on sin, and his desire to destroy it has been so great that he has not only required his apostles and the preachers he sent out to destroy vice and combat sin to take up arms, but wills, quite generally, that all his subjects, on pain of incurring his displeasure, wage war on sin and fight it with all their strength. I am here, my brothers, to enlist you in this army, and I would gladly address to you the same military exhortation that the divine Moses once gave: “Whoever is on the Lord's side, let him join me” (Exodus 32)—if you are on God's side, join me. I fight vice in public; you, fight it in private and in secret, through the fraternal correction that is commanded of us in our Gospel.

SERMON ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MUST PRECEDE AND ACCOMPANY THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT

"When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near."

(Luke 21.)

Most men, my brothers, are moved only by what is present before them, equally unmoved by what is no longer and by what is not yet. They consider past evils without resentment, and future evils without fear. Is there anything more terrible than what sacred history tells us of the flood? Yet because it is over, and the waters, now confined within their bed, no longer threaten the world, we recall it without pain, we speak of it without emotion. Is there anything more dreadful than what the Gospel foretells of the last judgment? Yet because that time seems far off to us, and because we do not perceive the signs that must precede it, we either neglect to reflect on it, or we reflect on it without fear—although it is, nevertheless, the thing in the world most capable of making an impression on our hearts, if only we did not picture it as so distant, as Saint Augustine himself admits was true of him.

Is there not, then, some way of making this idea more moving by bringing it closer? Here is one, my brothers. We have two judgments to dread: one general, which we may regard as fairly distant; the other particular, which is no more distant than the moment of our death—which may be very near indeed. This particular judgment is no less to be feared than the general judgment, and if we compare the two, it is certain that the signs which will precede them both, and the circumstances that will accompany them, will appear to us equally terrible. The signs of the particular judgment are what the royal prophet calls the pains of death; the circumstances of that judgment are

what he calls the perils of hell: “The sorrows of death encompassed me, and the perils of hell found me” (Psalm 18).

Tremble, my brothers: you will soon experience the pains of death, and the perils of hell into which you will fall are not far off at all. The pains of death will precede your particular judgment; they will be its signs, and they are violent enough to shake the most fearless heart. The perils of hell will accompany it; they are great enough to terrify even the most innocent heart. The pains of death, the perils of hell, the signs and circumstances of the particular judgment—which make it no less terrible than the general judgment—these, then, will be the subject of this discourse and the object of your attention.

FIRST POINT

We can foresee how furious a storm will be from the violence of its thunder, the darkness of the sky, the multitude of its lightning flashes, the raging of the winds, and the roar of the waves that precede it. The prophets have spoken of the last judgment as a storm that will break upon the heads of sinners: “Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord, a fury going forth, a sweeping tempest, shall rest upon the head of the wicked” (Jeremiah 30). So too we may judge the severity of that judgment by the signs that will precede it. And can anything more terrible than these signs be imagined? Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom; there will be plagues, famines, earthquakes. The sun will be darkened, the moon will no longer give her light, the stars will fall, the powers of the heavens will be shaken. At last, amid the roar of a dreadful tempest, the heavens will pass away, the burning elements will dissolve, and the earth will be consumed by fire. Dreadful spectacle, dreadful spectacle—what do you announce? The day of the Lord, the day of the last judgment, a day that can only be a day of terror, preceded as it is by such fearful signs.

Though the signs of the particular judgment are less spectacular, I dare nonetheless to assure you that they portend no less suffering. These signs are the pains of death—inward pains, outward pains, pains violent enough to shake the most fearless heart. Let us begin with the inward ones.

What is more disastrous than the civil war that lays waste the heart of a dying sinner? One of Job's friends wished that the Lord would rain war down like a flood upon the head of the wicked man: “Let his own war rain down upon him” (Job 20). God will indeed rain down this war, says Saint Gregory, when he comes to judge the sinner and punish him in hell. But before that war which God rains down upon the head of a sinner already dead, he stirs up another war within the heart of the sinner who is dying. His attachment to the objects that once flattered his passions will not let him despise them, yet the fear of being punished for having loved them urges him to abandon them. Dragged along by old habits, held back by new reflections, assailed by remorse, his poor heart does not know which way to turn—toward grace or toward sin. Everything within him is in revolt. Thoughts, desires, love, hatred, hope, despair—all are at war within him. Happy is he if, during this conflict, the abomination of desolation does not take hold of him—I mean, if final impenitence does not settle into his heart. Happy is he if famine and plague do not follow this war, if the sick man, near death, is not justly deprived of the effective help of grace, and if the love of sin does not finish corrupting him.

But these signs are too inward to move us; they appear only in the depths of the heart. The dying man feels them, but we do not see them. Here are some more perceptible ones. If man is a little world unto himself, the upheavals he suffers at the end of his life, just before he is destroyed, are in no way inferior to the upheavals that will convulse the great world at the end of the ages. The heavens, the stars, the elements, the earth—all will be thrown into confusion before the last judgment. In the same way, the mind, the will, the senses, the body—all will fall into disorder before the particular judgment.

Do you wish to see these signs fulfilled? Consider a man on the point of death. What an overturning in that little world! The Sage paints this very picture in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes. He speaks of the ills that will accompany old age, and what he says applies even better to the last moment of life. Nothing more closely resembles the disorder of the universe on the eve of the general judgment. "Remember your Creator," he says, "while you are young, before you come into a time of affliction, into days that are grievous and unpleasant, when the sun, the moon, and the stars will grow dark, when the keepers of the house will begin to tremble, and the whole structure will threaten ruin." Is this not, my brothers, exactly what will happen at the hour of death? The eyes, so often compared to the sun, will grow dark; the senses, represented by the stars, will seem to fail as they lose the use of their functions; the vapors rising to the brain will form storms and tempests; the body, which is like the earth, will be shaken by the redoubling of the sickness; and the mind, which is like the heavens, will grow dark. At last the whole frame will be destroyed.

"Woe to those who are with child, and to those who give suck in those days," said Jesus Christ, speaking of the upheavals of the universe before the last judgment. Woe, I may add, woe to sinners who cherish great hopes, or who possess great wealth, at the hour of death: "Woe to those who are with child and those who give suck in those days" (Matthew 24). Women with child, says Saint Augustine, represent those who have conceived the hope of some great fortune, and who are, so to speak, filled with the desire for worldly goods. Mothers nursing their children represent those who have brought their undertakings to completion and now enjoy the fruit of their desires. Woe, then, to those who die if death surprises them at a time when they are full of desire and hope of establishing themselves in this world and possessing great wealth in it! Woe to them if it surprises them in the midst of abundance, as they spend their days enjoying the goods of the earth: "Woe to those with child and those

who give suck in those days!" What a bitter turn of events! "I was forming great plans," one man will say; "fortune was smiling on me. I was about to be happy." "I already was," another will say; "I had great positions and great wealth, and now I must die—I must pass suddenly from the midst of glory into the disgrace of the tomb, from the bosom of abundance into the bosom of barrenness." Yes, we must die when the moment appointed by divine Providence has come; and here it appears all the more clearly how closely what precedes the particular judgment resembles what will precede the universal judgment. At the end of the ages, a devouring fire will reduce the universe to ashes. At the end of life, the burning of a fever, or some other disorder of the humors, will consume the body. Men who see the first flames of that final conflagration will be seized with terror, and will wait in dread to see what the end of the disasters threatening the world will be. In the same way, the soul that notices the violence of its sickness will be seized with fear as it awaits the outcome. Enter, my brothers, enter into the feelings of that soul suspended between time and eternity, compelled to leave its body and depart the world, weighed down by the memory of its sins, foreseeing the severity of the judgment it is about to undergo. Nothing consoles it; everything afflicts it. The pleasures it once enjoyed, the wealth and honors it once possessed, the objects it once loved—everything capable of causing it pain now presents itself to its mind to torment it. Imagine the pain a great tree would feel, if it could feel, when it is torn from the earth that nourishes it. What violence must be done to it! How many fibers and roots must be cut before it can be separated from the ground! Such is the pain a sinful soul suffers when death tears it from the world and separates it from its body. "Cut down the tree," says God; "strip off its branches, shake off its leaves, scatter its fruit in every direction." In a word, everything is taken from that poor soul at the hour of death; everything is torn away from it. And so it cries out inwardly, like the unfortunate king of the Amalekites: "O sad and crushing separation! O pitiless

death! Is this how you tear me from what was so closely bound to me? Must you separate us so bitterly, O death?" (1 Kings 15).

Such, my brothers, are the signs that precede the particular judgment—and was I not right to tell you that they are violent enough to shake the most fearless heart? But will there be time, when these signs actually arrive and we feel them, to reflect on them as they deserve? A sick man can be shaken without profiting from it. If the state he is in leaves him enough reason to notice the danger threatening him, it rarely leaves him enough to seek ways of avoiding it. It is, then, less for the salvation of those who are dying that God sends these signs than for the salvation of those who watch them die. They terrify the dying; they instruct those who witness death—and I find it hard to understand how we can see them so often without becoming any better for it.

We cannot say, as the wicked said in the words of the royal prophet, that we see no signs: "We do not see our signs" (Psalm 74). We see them everywhere and at every hour. Almost nothing meets our eyes that does not warn us that we must die. Funeral processions and mourning garments, the tears of many of our friends, announce this news to us. We find traces of death at almost every step. Others die; we have no privilege exempting us from so universal a law; and when we are spectators at a funeral procession, we ought to reflect that one day we ourselves shall furnish the spectacle. But can we think of this without at the same time thinking of forestalling, through a good life, the evils that the pains of death threaten us with? We would be astonished at the insensibility of a man who, seeing the signs of the last judgment, did not prepare to appear before his judge. If the upheaval foretold in the Gospel were to occur today, we would, in our terror, hasten to bring forth worthy fruits of penitence, and whoever remained unmoved would be thought a madman. "That man wants to be damned," we would say. Why, then, do we not make the same reflection when we see in our friends, when we feel in ourselves, the signs that announce that our own particular judgment is soon to come? Our

illnesses, says Saint Gregory, warn us that our death is near: “The distress of sickness shows that death is at hand.” We do notice these signs, for we complain bitterly enough of our ailments and take great care to remedy them. To notice them and yet not do penance, not change our lives, not atone for our sins, is a folly we would never forgive in others, and one we ought not to forgive in ourselves. We would be excusable if the pains of death led only to death itself. But they are the signs of a judgment that must follow them, and that judgment is infinitely more terrible. The Gospel tells us that the signs preceding the last judgment will be only the beginning of sorrows: “These are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24). We may say the same of the pains of death. They will be only the beginning of far greater sorrows—I mean the perils of hell, with which we will be threatened in the particular judgment that follows our death. Let us examine these perils; they will prove terrible, and you will admit that they are capable of frightening even the most innocent heart.

SECOND POINT

It is decreed that men will die once, and that after this comes judgment: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9). None of us is ignorant of these two truths. Experience does not allow us to doubt the first. The faith you profess does not allow you to doubt the second. You are men and Christians. As men, you know that you must die. As Christians, you know that you must give God an account of your life as soon as it ends in your death. Since the soul, once separated from the body, is no longer able either to commit new crimes or to atone for those it has already committed, it would serve no purpose to delay its judgment. What would become of it, asks Tertullian, if that judgment were delayed? Uncertain of its fate, wavering between hope and fear, neither happy nor wretched, it would have either too much repose for a guilty soul, or too much anxiety for an

innocent one. God is too just to leave a soul in so uncertain a state. He judges souls the moment they are separated from the body, and, to use Saint Thomas's words, from that very moment the soul is judged, and knows what its destiny will be throughout eternity. Oh, how fearsome is the judgment that decides this! The greatest saints have never thought of it without dread. Whoever does not tremble at the mention of judgment, says Saint Augustine, is more a beast than a man: "They neither feared, nor were they men." But which of the two judgments, the particular or the general, ought naturally to cause the greater fear? Let us examine this in light of two chief differences between them. The one takes place in secret, between the judge and the guilty soul. The other takes place in the sight of all mankind. The second is only a confirmation of the first. The first is new; it decides our destiny for the first time. Let us take up the matter again.

To rise from the tomb and find oneself suddenly in the midst of every human being who has ever lived—some vomited forth from hell to return there, others descending from heaven to return there; some dead for six or seven thousand years, others who will have passed almost in the same instant from life to death and from death to resurrection; some who will be our friends, others whom we will never have known—to find oneself, I say, in the midst of all these people will certainly be, for each of us, a great cause of astonishment and fear. But do you believe, my brothers, that it will be any less a cause of astonishment for all of us to find ourselves suddenly alone in some unknown region, not knowing what is to become of us? Yet that is exactly how we shall find ourselves at the particular judgment.

What a dreadful novelty! What a strange solitude, to find no one there but God alone! And what a grim necessity, for a sinful soul, to deal with God alone and face to face! Can you truly form an idea, my brothers, of what it means for God alone and a soul alone—a guilty soul in his presence, and, if I dare say it, face to face with the judge of the living and the dead, a severe and

inexorable judge? Reflect carefully on what you have said a hundred times: “I shall have to appear before God, I shall have to answer to God.” Understand all the sorrow and desolation contained in those few words! A soul separated from everything and outside of everything—outside the prison of its body, outside this visible world, outside the bounds of time, outside the company of this present age—alone before God alone! Once again, what could be more dreadful than this solitude? And does it not hold something more terrifying than anything we can imagine in the general assembly of all mankind at the last judgment?

But what I am about to add will show you that the first judgment is more terrible than the second. It is in that first judgment that man will find himself amid the perils of hell, and these perils have something so dreadful about them that they can terrify even the most innocent heart.

We shall already have been judged by the time we appear at the last judgment. Those of us on whom God has had mercy will already be assured of their happiness, and will not fear losing it. Most of them will already have enjoyed it; and before the sovereign judge invites them to come and possess the kingdom he prepared for them from the beginning of the ages, he will already have put them in possession of it. Those he has justly condemned, having nothing left to hope for, will likewise have nothing left to fear. Even before being banished from his presence, they will already have learned that not to see him is the greatest of all evils.

But picture to yourselves a soul about to appear at the particular judgment. With what perils is it not surrounded? It will find as many perils as there have been thoughts, words, and deeds in the whole course of its life. What terror, what dread, to feel an innumerable multitude of forgotten sins rising up again from the depths of conscience! So many shameful thoughts, so many illicit desires, so many sins of youth that had escaped all our efforts to trace them!

So many criminal actions once believed permissible! So many even pious acts that stood in need of penance! So many profaned sacraments! So many buried talents! So many graces despised! Relentless remorse, crushing conscience—into what perils do you not cast a soul about to appear before God! But let us go further into detail, and let each of you, imagining yourself at the hour of death, join me in the following reflections.

"I have committed a countless number of sins. Time has not erased a single one; God forgets none of them. He commands Saul to destroy the Amalekites for a fault their forefathers had committed four hundred years before. Will he forget the sins I have committed since I first came to the use of reason? Their great number will not allow a single one to slip past him. God counts the grains of sand of the sea: would he miscount my sins? The smallness of some of them will not stop him from taking note of them. He counts even our footsteps, says Job; how, then, could he fail to count our slightest desires and our lightest thoughts? All these sins will be so many perils surrounding me at the particular judgment, perils which, alas, may well lead me down to hell. Blinded by the false disguises of passion, swept along by the maxims of the world, misled by the flattering advice of a friend too self-interested or too indulgent, I have, in my uncertainty, mistaken the false for the true; I have believed permitted what was forbidden, indifferent what was criminal. Shameful impurities I regarded as weaknesses pardonable in youth; usurious loans, as legitimate interest; insatiable greed, as reasonable care for my family; profane practices, as mere propriety. But at the least ray of infinite wisdom, all these false gleams will vanish. Every deed will recover its true name and appear as it really is. Shall I then be able to plead my ignorance as an excuse? Perhaps it was willful. My good faith? Perhaps it was only apparent. Did I not have reason to doubt the uprightness of my heart, and the supposed indifference of my actions? Should I not have listened more closely to my faith and my reason? Alas, everywhere I believed myself innocent, and

everywhere I shall find nothing but the perils of hell. I believed I had done some good works; but are they, in the eyes of God, what they seemed to be in mine? My gold may turn to foam; what seemed to me virtue may turn out to be a fault, my zeal mere temper, my devotion—which made such a show in the eyes of the world—hypocrisy or stubbornness, my patience mere dullness of mind. There are, then, perils leading down to hell even hidden within my very virtues. There are perils in the wealth God gave me the use of, in the family he entrusted to my care and that I raised so poorly, in the affairs that passed through my hands and that I managed so unfaithfully; there are perils in my occupations, in my dealings with others. Alas, which of us will escape so many perils, and not be terrified by them?"

I have said that even the saints were terrified by them, and it is impossible that sinners should not be. For what will the reed of the desert do, when the cedar of Lebanon trembles; and, as the Prince of the Apostles says, what will become of the sinner, if the righteous is scarcely saved? I do not know, my brothers, what impression the sight of these perils now makes upon your minds. Here is the impression it made on the mind of a solitary monk, as Saint John Climacus, who witnessed it, relates. This solitary, near death, was carried away in spirit, and having seen, in that rapture, the strictness exercised in the particular judgment, obtained from God some delay in which to do penance. He spent that delay in penance for thirty-two years, until the moment of his death. But how? Shut up in a cell, never leaving it, never speaking, living on nothing but bread and water, he sat continually, seeming almost beside himself, forever going over in his mind what he had seen. His thought was so fixed upon that vision that his gaze, like his mind, remained fixed on a single point, and one could scarcely tell he was alive except by the tears that streamed from his eyes. As the hour of his death drew near, he was asked to say some words of edification, and he uttered only these: "In truth, if men

knew how fearsome is the judgment that follows death, they could never bring themselves to offend God."

Ah, my brothers, do not deceive yourselves; you will soon experience what this judgment will be—it is therefore important that you know its severity now. But must it be shown to you in a rapture in order for you to know it? Does not faith suffice? It would take only reflecting on what faith teaches you to be seized with a fear like that which gripped this solitary monk, and to resolve to imitate, at least in some measure, his penance. Remember often what will happen to you at your last end, says the Wise Man, and you will never sin. Remember the pains of death, which you cannot avoid, and which will be the signs of the particular judgment you must expect. Remember the perils of hell in which you will find yourself, and which will be the circumstances accompanying that terrible judgment. Remember, finally, that these pains and these perils are very near, and that you will experience them when you least expect it. Occupied with these thoughts, you will atone for your past sins, avoid committing others, and merit finding mercy before the God who will judge us all. Amen.

SERMON ON HELL

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment."
(Matthew 25.)

If, my brothers, God's decrees were like those of men, which so often go unenforced, what I have told you of God's judgment would be far less terrible and far less to be feared, and you would always have some reason to reassure yourselves with the hope of escaping its effects. But scarcely will this sovereign judge of the living and the dead have pronounced his sentence of condemnation, scarcely will he have spoken those thunderous words, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matthew 25), when these unhappy victims will go into everlasting punishment. You will notice, no doubt, my brothers, in this sentence, a twofold penalty imposed for sin: separation from God—"depart from me"—and the torment of fire—"into everlasting fire"—and this is the just punishment that sin deserves.

Sin contains a twofold malice, and whoever commits it does two great evils. He forsakes God and attaches himself to the creature. He forsakes God, who is his beginning and his end; he attaches himself to the creature, which is nothing but vanity and corruption. By a sacrilegious contempt of his Creator, he prefers the creature to him and raises it above him. It is therefore just that the punishment God reserves for this offense should likewise contain a twofold penalty corresponding to this twofold malice: a penalty of loss and a penalty of sense; a penalty of loss, which is the deprivation of God, to punish the contempt the sinner showed him during his life; a penalty of sense, which is a sensible pain caused by frightful torments, to punish the pleasure he sought in the creature. In a word, a sinner in hell loses forever a God of goodness—that is his first misfortune. He finds forever a God of vengeance—that is the crowning point of his misery, and the whole substance of this discourse.

FIRST POINT

I will establish the greatness of the pain a damned soul suffers through the loss of God on three grounds: first, on the infinite goods contained in the Godhead, which are lost when God is lost; second, on the violent inclination a soul has to be united to God; and third, on the ceaseless reflection it will make in hell that it lost this infinite good through its own fault, and for things that amount to nothing.

God, says Saint Denis, is an infinite God, infinitely perfect, not only in his essence but in all his adorable perfections. His wisdom is infinite and infinitely perfect; his holiness is infinite and infinitely perfect—and so with all his other attributes. When, therefore, one loses God, one loses not merely a single infinite good, but an infinity of infinite goods, all gathered together at the very center of the Godhead; so that if we measure the excess of the pain of being deprived of all these goods by the excess of the joy one feels in possessing them—oh, my brothers, how keen that pain must be! If the saints who possess these goods in heaven are flooded, in the Scripture's own words, with a torrent of delights, must not the damned, deprived of them in hell, be drowned and submerged in a sea of sorrow? To lose a God of goodness is to lose the best of all fathers, the most lovable of all spouses, the most faithful, the richest, the most powerful of all friends; it is to be stripped of one's rights to the everlasting possession of the first of all beings, the most excellent and most perfect of all beings. A pain, says Saint Bernard, that can be measured only by the infinity of God, since it is nothing less than the loss of God himself, and is as great as God himself is great.

It was with this very punishment that God once threatened his people as the greatest evil that could befall them. It was this loss of God that David dreaded as the most fearsome of all torments. “My God,” said that prophet, “do not withdraw from me, do not cast me from your presence. Punish my sin,

Lord, with every kind of torment—I have deserved it. The one grace I ask of you is never to be deprived of your face" (Psalm 51).

Great prophet, why do you not rather beg God not to hurl you into hell, not to condemn you to those devouring flames? No, no, my brothers, nothing moves him but the loss of God.

All the other torments of hell seem to him more bearable than the loss of that infinite good. Imagine, says Saint Chrysostome, torments a thousand times more cruel and more painful than all the fires of hell together; they would still be more bearable than the loss of God. Sunk as we are at present in the mire of flesh and blood, we can hardly bring ourselves to believe this truth. Our faith, dimmed or weakened by the thick cloud of passion, presents God to us only faintly, and having only a very imperfect notion of his infinite perfections, we feel neither the greatness of this loss nor the violent inclination our souls have to unite themselves to him as to their beginning and their last end. The weight of our bodies draws our souls toward the earth, and the coarse movements of this corrupted mass make all our thoughts and affections, here below, entirely carnal.

But in hell, the fatal blindfold is removed, and truth appears in the full light of day. The burden is thrown off; the soul no longer depends on the body, it is no longer held back by the coarse organs of the senses. It has a freer and more perfect knowledge of God. It sees that in him resides the fullness of every good; that to possess him is to possess everything, that he is the center of its rest, and that it was made for nothing but to possess him. Thus enlightened, it knows what a calamity it is to lose him. Thus freed of every obstacle, it feels the whole force of that violent inclination which draws it toward this first Being as toward its beginning and its end. It rushes ceaselessly from the midst of its flames to reach him; it hurtles toward that divine object with inconceivable speed. It flies toward him faster than the

arrow flies to its mark, faster than the bird swoops upon its prey, faster than fire rises to its native sphere, faster than the stone falls to the earth's center—and these movements grow ever stronger in it, driven by the extreme desire it has to be delivered from the cruel torments it endures.

But what is its astonishment, at that very moment, to find itself rejected, driven back by an invisible hand, torn from the chaste embrace of its heavenly bridegroom! It redoubles its efforts, it struggles, it agonizes. Nothing can any longer deceive it or turn it aside. A thousand worlds might present themselves to it in the most alluring guise, and it would remain unmoved. It has known its end, it has seen it, it feels the overpowering force that masters and drives it. But the closer it approaches, the more God withdraws. The harder it strives, the more God resists it. The further it advances, the more God repels it. It will go toward God without ceasing, but God will never come toward it.

"O watcher of men, why have you made me your target?" (Job 7). Ah, great God, in what anguish this poor soul finds itself! Will you never have pity on the desperate efforts it makes to be united to you? — "No," the Lord answers, "never shall it see me. Go, then, unhappy soul, find, if you can, some relief among the damned—for you shall never see your God."

It is then that this wretched, reprobate soul will feel within itself a terrible and dreadful conflict between the two most violent passions in man, driven on the one hand by an ardent desire to be united to God, because he is its beginning and its end; and driven on the other by an implacable hatred of that same God, because he is now its enemy. Weighed down by its own sin, and by a forced resentment, it will wish to flee from God; and even as it recoils from him in horror, it will feel itself drawn toward him by the very inclination of its nature. It will want to hate him, and it will love him. It will desire him, and it will curse him. It will wish to possess God and to destroy him. It longs to be united to him, and, unable to be, it wishes he did not exist; and amid these

contrary and useless impulses, it falls into despair. Unable to do anything against its judge, it turns all its fury against itself. Being wretched, it will wish at least to cease to exist, by destroying its very substance. “Shall I never perish?” it will say to itself, like the unfortunate Absalom. “Shall I never be annihilated? I know the sentence has been pronounced; never shall I see my God face to face; never shall I enjoy him. But if this angered God is inexorable toward me, if he has resolved never to forgive me, if he means forever to remember my crimes, then why does he not at least destroy me, why does he not reduce me to nothing? Let him kill me, since he remembers my iniquity” (2 Kings 14).

Useless fury, useless despair. The soul will live on, and will never see its God. Not only its soul but even its body will be made immortal, so that it may feel all the more keenly the greatness of its loss—a fury and despair that will be weighed down further still by the cruel reflection that a damned soul, having lost God through its own fault, will make without ceasing.

However unfortunate a person may be, when he has given no cause for his own misfortune, he is happier than he might think. Being guilty of nothing, he enjoys the tranquility of a clear conscience, and has at least this consolation: that he is unhappy only because he could not have been otherwise. But when a man is unhappy through his own fault—when he could easily have avoided it, when, holding his fate in his own hands and free to choose one path or the other, he has hurled himself into the abyss of his own free will, without necessity—this reflection alone, my brothers, is as painful, and causes as much suffering to an unfortunate soul, as the misfortune itself. Now, in hell, a sinner will see himself at every moment, in the full horror of his crimes. Sin will then appear without veil, without disguise, without pretext. That worm of conscience, those remorseful pangs he had stifled during his life, will come back to life to torment him eternally, and will keep before his eyes forever the dreadful, yet freely chosen, loss he made of his God and of his paradise. This

is the prophet's very thought. Hear how he expresses it: “The wicked man shall see it and be enraged; he shall gnash his teeth and waste away” (Psalm 112). He shall see, that unhappy sinner, that God had created him only to give himself to him and make him happy; and he shall be enraged at having willfully lost that gift. He shall see that Jesus Christ died only to redeem him and win heaven for him; and he shall be enraged at having lost the fruit of that precious blood. He shall see the graces he despised, all the sacraments he abused; and he shall be enraged at having turned every one of these means of salvation into grounds for his own condemnation. He shall see, and he shall be enraged at having lost God, and above all at having lost him for things that were nothing at all—at having lost an infinity of true goods for a single moment of false pleasure.

“I have lost my God,” he will say in his despair, “I lost him through my own fault, and in losing him I lost the paradise where he reigns. Ah, heavenly homeland, I was made for you; I hoped to enter you. But, wretched as I am, I shall never enter you now. In losing God, I have lost myself. I have therefore lost everything in losing him; and in this universal ruin, I have nothing left but my own existence, only enough to feel this strange and total loss, only enough to grieve and despair all the more. O abyss of misery! O unbearable torment! This, then, is my portion. Ah, vanity of the world, what good have honors and riches done us! What has pride profited us, and what has the boasting of riches brought us? (Wisdom 5). They lasted only a moment, and for that moment I have lost my God! Deceitful pleasures, you passed in an instant, and for that fatal instant I have lost my God—I have lost a God of goodness, and I have found a God of vengeance.”

SECOND POINT

If the Apostle has said of paradise that eye has never seen, nor ear ever heard, nor has the human mind ever conceived the great goods God prepares

for those who love him, I may say with equal reason the very same thing of the dreadful evils that the Lord reserves for those who refused to love him. There have been, it is true, barbarous instruments and machines devised to make men suffer. There have been wheels, gibbets, blazing braziers, racks, boiling oils employed to torment the martyrs. But what is all of this? A faint image, a poor sample, a mere shadow of hell. What, then, is this hell, and how are the damned tormented in it? These are two questions I must answer. First, what is hell? Ah, my brothers, could I tell you without horror? Could you hear it without trembling? So as not to exaggerate anything in a matter of such importance, I wish to speak to you only in the language of Scripture and the Fathers. Forgive me the frequent citations I will make from them, the better to support what I must tell you. What is hell? It is, according to Saint Thomas, a place beneath the earth, at the center of the world, where divine justice condemns all who die in mortal sin. It is in these dark dungeons that God pours out, in great torrents, the waters of his wrath, and forms the lake of his fury, in which the damned are plunged, buried, and engulfed: “An angel cast them into the great lake of wrath” (Revelation 14). It is there, where mercy is eclipsed, that divine justice extends its dominion without restraint, and forms a dreadful sea where, according to Saint Chrysostom, waves of fire, rising like mountains, stir up terrible storms that can never be calmed, peace and mercy never reigning over that fierce element: an impassable sea, in which fiery waves rise up like mountains, whose flame forms an abyss of the greatest violence.

It is there, says the royal Prophet, that the terrible and all-powerful hand of God has formed an eternal prison, to serve as an everlasting monument to his vengeance, and to display what an angered God can do. That avenging hand has surrounded it with blazing rocks, paneled it with flames, and adorned it with braziers: “He has kindled fire round about his enemies” (Psalm 97). God has covered it, says Job, with the shadows of death and the darkness of an

everlasting night. There, nothing is seen but disorder, confusion, horror. There, says Isaiah, instead of streams and fountains, God causes rivers of pitch and brimstone to flow: “Its streams shall be turned into pitch” (Isaiah 34). There, says David, is no more peace, no more tranquility. A spirit of storm and tempest continually agitates those unhappy sinners: “A storm-wind is the portion of their cup” (Psalm 11). There, no more friendship, no more gentleness, no more compassion. It is, says the Holy Spirit, a place of hatred, fury, and rage. Nothing is heard there but cries, gnashing of teeth, blasphemies, curses, and dreadful howls: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8). Nothing is seen there but frightful specters and horrible phantoms; nothing is tasted there but the gall of dragons and the venom of serpents; nothing is drunk there but the cup of God's fury: “The wine of dragons is their drink” (Deuteronomy 32); “they shall drink from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath” (Isaiah 51). In a word, it is the center of every evil, the gathering-place of every torment, the storehouse of every abomination, the theater of every torment an avenging God can prepare for the sinner: “Tophet has been made ready from of old; it is made deep and wide, its fuel is fire and much wood” (Isaiah 30). Ah, Christians, how terrible it is to lose a God of goodness, only to fall into the hands of a God of vengeance! Worldly greatness, worldly pleasures—is this, then, the end you come to? O dreadful region, region of death and torment, region of tears and misery! My hair stands on end, says Saint Bernard, my blood runs cold in my veins, my whole body trembles and shudders at the mere thought of hell; and if you ask me, my brothers, what the damned suffer from all these torments, and how they suffer them, I will answer you: first, that they suffer them in their fullest rigor, without any relief, without any consolation; second, that they suffer them universally, in every part of their being; and third, that they suffer them, finally, for all eternity.

They suffer them in their fullest rigor, because everything that exists in God—wisdom, power, immensity, holiness—having been offended by sin, the entire fullness of the Godhead, says Tertullian, will be brought to bear in inflicting these torments upon sinners. They suffer them without consolation. They will have none from God, who will be the just avenger of their crimes; none from the demons, who will be their cruel torturers; none from their own relatives and friends, who will become their mortal enemies. "Accursed father, father too indulgent," this despairing son will say, "it is you who are the cause of my ruin. If you had corrected me in my excesses, I would not now be the wretched victim of these devouring flames." "It is you, on the contrary," this father will answer, "you who were the occasion of my eternal ruin. I damned myself by working to establish you in the world at the expense of my own conscience." "Wretched daughter," this mother will say, "if I suffer such frightful torments, it is you who caused them; it was for loving you too much, for indulging your wild ways." "Accursed mother," this daughter will answer, "if I am wretched forever, it is the fruit of the bad examples you gave me, of the company you led me into, of the vanity you instilled in me—that, that is what has damned me. Ah, cursed be the day I came from your womb." "Wretched seducer, it is you who plunged me into this abyss of torment," another will say, damned for her impurities. "You drew me into your unclean dealings, and I indulged your passion through my own weak compliance." "No, wretch," this man will answer, "no, it was not I who ruined you. You yourself were the first cause of our shared damnation. Your immodesty, your affected tenderness, your lascivious songs, your eagerness to please me—these drew me into disorder, and from that disorder into hell. Ah, how I could tear you apart! How I will avenge myself on you forever!" Vain lovers of a still vainer beauty, companions in debauchery, friends of the table, whatever bond of good feeling unites you now, it will turn into hatred and rage in hell. To the unclean fire in which you burn here below will succeed

another fire, which, raised up by the almighty power of God to be the instrument of his justice, will act in a manner beyond conceiving, yet altogether real, says Saint Augustine, upon your souls, upon every part of your body, without exception.

Wretched victims of God's vengeance, you will be salted with this devouring fire: “Every sacrifice shall be salted with fire” (Mark 9). What an expression, my brothers! That is to say, just as salt seeps into and penetrates every part of a piece of meat, so this just judge will make the fire of his fury seep in everywhere, penetrating the whole of the damned soul, setting its soul and body ablaze. Fire in the eyes, fire in the lungs, fire in the marrow of the bones, fire in the brain, fire in the heart—nothing that will not be covered and saturated with this fire. And just as salt preserves the meat it penetrates, so this infernal fire will preserve sinners forever. It seems, says Cassiodorus, to burn them only in order to preserve them, and to preserve them only in order to burn them. In a word, their torments will last for all eternity. What! My brothers, to suffer for an eternity, to burn for an eternity! Eternity—what am I saying? This word pierces my heart, and my heart cannot fathom it. My tongue pronounces it, and my mind cannot comprehend it.

Imagine myriads of years, millions of ages. Imagine still more: suppose whatever you like about the future, and, to use an ordinary figure of speech, imagine the time it would take a bird to empty the sea if it took only a single drop every hundred thousand years, and there were as many oceans as there are drops of water—all of that would still be nothing compared to eternity, and yet a damned soul must burn throughout that entire eternity. But, Lord, is it then irrevocably decreed that you will never show mercy to the damned? No, never: “I will not have mercy forever” (Isaiah 57). Divine justice, after so many millions of ages spent in excessive torment, is that still not enough? Will these torments never end? God the avenger, can the tears and regrets of so many wretched souls never soften your anger? Never, for them, any return

to my mercy. O never, great never, so long as God is God! I lose myself, I am overwhelmed, my senses reel, my reason grows troubled. Forever, as long as God lives, as long as God is God—eternity! In truth, my brothers, in truth, either you do not believe these things, or—allow me to say it—you are madmen and lunatics if you do not change your way of life. Ah, which of you could endure these blazing furnaces for an eternity, and yet which of you does not make himself guilty every day of so many mortal sins, the least of which is enough to hurl him into them? To lose forever a God of goodness, to find forever a God of vengeance—such is the fate of unrepentant sinners. Such is the just punishment of a single mortal sin. Think on this, my brothers, think on it well. I leave you with these reflections. Amen.

SERMON ON PARADISE

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, who satisfies your desire with good things."
(Psalm 103.)

To call beatitude merely the repose of our desires, my brothers, is not to explain its whole essence; God does not merely satisfy our desires, he surpasses them—he goes beyond our vows, as Saint Augustine says. But since this excess, proportioned as it is to his own greatness, lies beyond our understanding, while the blessed themselves experience how far God surpasses their desires, it must suffice for us to know that he satisfies them.

The passion of desire is always a source of misery. It is through the futility of desire that God punishes the damned in hell; it is through the disorder of desire that he chastises sinners on earth; it is through the prolonging of desire that he tests the righteous during their earthly life. We will therefore have reason to value the happiness of the saints once we recognize that their hearts

no longer feel these restless movements, and that their desires are fully satisfied.

Saint Thomas views their blessedness from this angle: he calls it a silence, a rest, a fulfillment of all our desires—a repose of desires. It would be worth our while to follow this angelic doctor, and to show how beatitude fulfills our desires for knowledge, virtue, honor, reputation, wealth, pleasure, and life itself. But that design is too vast; I will confine it within narrower bounds, and limit myself to the three desires of knowledge, honor, and pleasure. These are the three most violent desires, and, as Saint Augustine observes, they are nothing other than the three forms of concupiscence marked out in Scripture. They comprise all the sins of those who are curious, proud, or given to pleasure. Yet it is in vain that men seek the fulfillment of these desires on earth. It is in vain, curious souls, that you seek out fine learning. It is fruitless, ambitious souls, that you long for great honors. It is in vain, pleasure-seeking souls, that you look there for true pleasures. These goods are found only in heaven. It is there alone that desires come to rest, and if you consider the saints who reign there with God, you will admit that, in the happiness they possess, God fulfills the desire for knowledge with wondrous understanding, the desire for glory with the highest honors, and the desire for pleasure with ineffable delights. This is what I shall try to explain to you, however imperfectly, if you will permit me, Lord, and if you will deign to lift a corner of the veil that hides eternity from us. We ask this grace through the intercession of her who felt its first fruits, at the moment when the angel said to her: Hail, Mary.

FIRST POINT

Curiosity, one of our most violent passions, is also the most troublesome, because it is the most useless. It is in vain that we spend our best days, that we squander our health, to satisfy that innate desire to know. The first man fell

into blindness when he sought to satisfy it, and we recognize our own powerlessness whenever we try to content it. Curious minds, burning with this lust of the eyes, slaves to the desire for knowledge, seeking to feed yourselves on subtle learning—how truly pitiable you are! What good does this mad passion do you? Do you still not know that the earth is the dwelling place of darkness, that truth is not to be found there, and that falsehood reigns there just as death does? Let us not speak of the other things you seek out so fruitlessly; let us forget all your errors, and examine only what you know of God. You were created to know him, and without that knowledge you cannot be happy. However enlightened you may be, the same may be said of you as of all men: that you see God, but only from afar: "All men see God: each one gazes upon him from a distance" (Job 36). You know him only in riddles. You have only vague notions of his greatness. If the hands of pagans once fashioned idols, your mind forms only phantoms of divinity, for the mind of man has its idols, just as the hand does.

The ideas you have of his essence are but very imperfect images, and you believe you satisfy your curiosity with deceptive phantoms, or, as Saint Augustine says, with imaginary and counterfeit food. No, my brothers, this nourishment is not solid enough to satisfy the desire we have for knowledge. We need finer knowledge than this, and it is to be found only in heaven.

It is there that God satisfies the most violent of our desires, filling souls with light and splendor. It is there, says the Prophet-King, that, revealing his glory, he fully satisfies the curiosity of those who behold him: "I shall be satisfied when your glory appears" (Psalm 17). The darkness of this world no longer exists in that dwelling, where the dawn of faith is changed into the noonday of vision, according to those mysterious words: "You have shown the dawn its place" (Job 38)—you have shown the dawn the place it is to occupy. What is this dawn, asks Saint Gregory, if not the Church militant, which,

emerging from the night of unbelief, began to be born into the light of grace: “The dawn arising” (Song of Songs 6).

Indeed, the dawn, which joins night to day, shares in both these extremes, and forms a wondrous blend of darkness and brightness, in which it is hard to tell whether shadow and light agree with each other or contend against one another. The Church militant is in just such a state: it has both darkness and light; but at last it will arrive at a noonday that will have no shadow at all. It is then that it will occupy the place God has destined for it.

The bride once sighed after that noonday, longing to find there the fulfillment of her desires: “Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you rest it at noon” (Song of Songs 1). A place of peace, of brightness, and of fullness—so Saint Bernard explains it—a shining dwelling: you nourish my desires here, but you do not satisfy them fully. As long as this dawn that lights my way endures, my light is not perfect, my dwelling is not secure, and my nourishment does not still my hunger. Such, my brothers, are the desires of a soul which, in Saint Augustine's words, does not see what it believes, and longs to understand what it loves. But these desires have no place in heaven, where such souls find rest, and where no shadow stands in the way of their knowledge. And what is this knowledge? Ah, my brothers, how sublime it is, how wonderful! The blessed behold God in himself; they see this beloved sovereign in the fullness of his goodness; they see him as he is, without veil, without riddle, without any medium, face to face; they discover those adorable mysteries whose contemplation has been God's own happiness throughout all eternity. They see the Son proceeding from the Father, and the Father and the Son breathing forth the Holy Spirit. They understand how the Trinity does not destroy the unity of God; how the three Persons, though distinct from one another, are one and the same thing with the divine essence. Adorable object, ravishing sight—nothing more is needed, said Saint Philip, speaking to Jesus Christ: “Show us your Father, and it is enough for us.”

For, as Saint Augustine rightly reasons, whoever knows everything else, and does not know God, is unhappy. Whoever knows God, and knows nothing else, is happy; and whoever knows God, together with everything else besides, is no happier for knowing all those other things—he is perfectly happy simply because he knows God.

Yet, although this knowledge does not increase the essential happiness of the saints, they do not fail to possess it nonetheless. In God they see the order of creation, the state of the universe—in short, everything capable of delighting the mind and satisfying curiosity; and this, my brothers, without obscurity, without labor, without error: without obscurity, since they see everything within the very essence of God; without labor, since they are incapable of any effort at all. In short, says Saint Augustine, their knowledge is as certain as it is beautiful. It possesses these two qualities because they draw it from God with the greatest ease and without any difficulty at all. Who could fail to long for such beautiful knowledge? A queen from the south once came from the ends of the earth, drawn by the fame of Solomon. How, then, can men fail to hasten toward that blessed place, where every soul is wiser than that wise king ever was, and where God, through the abundance of his light, fills the whole vast expanse of our desire for knowledge. But perhaps, my brothers, these fine truths do not draw you; perhaps you are moved only by honor. Very well then, I must satisfy your ambition, and show you that, in heaven, God fulfills the desire for glory with the highest honors.

SECOND POINT

Since divine wisdom often makes use of the sinner himself to destroy sin, why should I hesitate to use, in establishing the happiness of the saints, their most violent and most dangerous passions? If there is scarcely any passion more violent than ambition, there is scarcely any more universal either. It is a plague that spreads from person to person, and one catches it all the more

easily because one is persuaded it is inseparable from a great heart and a great soul. Let us, then, give something to this pride of life, to this passion for greatness that enslaves so many. Come, ambitious hearts, who sigh after glory, give your ambitions whatever scope you please, wish for anything you dare—I mean to satisfy you. Would you not be content if I led you all the way to a throne, and set a crown upon your head? To give you all you could wish for is to number you among kings, who are raised above all other men, and subject to God alone. You seem content with these promises; yet I do not stop there. One could make you sovereigns, without your being happy for it.

The ordinary power of kings is a glorious servitude; they bear the weight of the world, and that burden crushes them. Besides, this power is very short-lived. The life of kings is as limited as that of their subjects: "The king is here today, and tomorrow he dies," says the Wise Man (Ecclesiasticus 10). Indeed, sovereignty always suffers far more from its emptiness than it enjoys from its fullness, and even if it were given to you, you would still always have much left to desire. But here is a kingdom that has none of these flaws. Consider it in the saints who possess it: it is free of all anxiety, and it has no end. Will that content you?

Do not doubt it, my brothers: the saints are kings. The Son of God has pledged to seat them upon his throne, and, to fulfill his promises, when he grants them eternal happiness, he will use these very words: "Come, you blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom" (Matthew 25). Come, you whom my Father has blessed: you were my servants on earth, be sovereigns with me now in heaven; you shared my cross, share now my throne; you obeyed, now come and rule; you gave up your possessions, now take possession of an empire, and do not fear the weight of this crown—it is not the kind one would refuse, if one knew how heavy it truly is; do not fear this empire, for it is free of anxiety and free of trouble.

For, I ask you, where could such anxiety come from? Perhaps from fear of civil war, perhaps from dread of foreign war, perhaps, finally, from a lack of the resources needed for the happiness of a state. The kingdom of heaven is perfectly free of all these imperfections; it suffers no civil wars. It is true that all the saints who reign in heaven occupy different places there, and that there is more variety among them than among the very stars; but although the justice that rewards them makes their conditions different, the charity that unites them makes their happiness common to all. Each one's particular happiness contributes to the happiness of all, and, since there is no envy there, this difference maintains peace rather than destroying it. This peaceful and unanimous passion is a special advantage of glory, found neither in nature nor in grace. I find a very natural figure of it in Genesis. Isaac had three wells dug; the first was maliciously disputed with him, and for this reason he named it Contention. Another quarrel arose over the second, and he called it Enmity. But finally he possessed the third in peace, and for that reason named it Abundance and Fullness. Could the three states of nature, grace, and glory be more naturally represented? These are, as it were, three springs of goods that God has dug out for his creatures. Since the goods of the first are small and never satisfy, they give rise to disputes among men, and might well be called by the name of Contention. The goods of grace are no less subject to such troubles. They are the cause of that great quarrel between men and the demons, who dispute with us the enjoyment of the goods they themselves have lost. These, then, might be called by the name of Enmity.

It is not so, my brothers, with glory. It is a spring that Scripture calls a river of peace. The goods that flow from it, infinite as they are, suffice for all the blessed, who, being perfectly satisfied, have no cause at all for jealousy.

It is no less true that in that happy kingdom, one has nothing to fear from foreign enemies. At the beginning of the ages, it is true, a fierce battle was fought there. But there you were defeated, ambitious Lucifer; there your pride

was humbled, you were hurled down from those delightful realms, and your fall was so sudden that you had no time even to notice the path by which you fell, so as to find your way back. Since that time, you have wandered upon the earth, sometimes through the air, but you can never rise again to heaven; the saints mock your efforts, and while you labor in vain, they enjoy a profound peace.

Finally, to banish every kind of anxiety, let us add that this peace comes with an astonishing abundance of every good thing. This is addressed to you, self-interested souls, to whom I have not yet spoken directly in this discourse. Time does not allow me to show at length how God fulfills your desires in heaven, just as he does everyone else's. I ask only, in Saint Paul's own words, that he grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that he enlighten your hearts, so that you may know the riches of the inheritance he destines for the saints. If he grants you this favor, you will know that the blessed, possessing all things in that one sovereign good, lack nothing that riches can offer, and that God fulfills in them the desire for wealth no less than the desire for glory.

In your view, my brothers, could a kingdom so full of abundance, so well fortified from without, so united within, possibly cause any anxiety to the sovereigns who possess it? And even if it still required some measure of care, these blessed souls rest entirely on the wise providence of God. Like the queens of this earth, who bear all the splendor of the crown and feel all its sweetness without feeling its weight, the saints share the throne of God and possess his dominion, leaving him to govern it entirely. O happiness beyond compare, joy beyond all estimation! But how long will it last? For all eternity.

Yes, my brothers, God, out of an excess of goodness, rewards small services with honors that will never end. Solomon, magnificent though he was, gave the king of Tyre command of only twenty cities for twenty years of service. God could likewise have measured out your reward according to the

length of your service, matching years of rest to years of labor, or, being infinitely generous, granting as many millions of years of happiness as we have spent years practicing virtue; yet he is not content with even that, and rewards mere moments with eternity. O generous measure, pressed down and running over, overflowing on every side, to use the Gospel's own words! The saints are kings, and they will remain kings throughout all eternity!

However ambitious you may be, my brothers, and however great your desire for glory, it seems to me that it will be more than fulfilled by this supreme, eternal, untroubled honor. Yet one last desire may remain to us: that of pleasure. It will be no less satisfied. God fills it with ineffable delights.

THIRD POINT

All the holy doctors make use of a comparison with the spiritual delights that God allows virtuous souls to taste in this life, in order to give us some idea of the pleasures he grants the blessed souls in heaven. There is nothing sweeter than these delights. Saint Bernard calls them a spiritual wine that gladdens the heart of man, and Saint Gregory assures us that its effect is so powerful that it reaches even into the body, so that, while the heart burns, the soul rejoices, the memory grows livelier, the understanding grows clearer, the flesh, heavy as it is, rejoices in the Lord: “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God” (Psalm 84). Now, says Saint Augustine, if God allows such charming delights to be tasted along the way, what will he do in our true homeland? He who feeds us so well upon the road—how much more fully will he satisfy us in our homeland? All the Fathers make the same reflection. If the mere shadow of Jesus Christ is so charming and sweet, says Saint Ambrose, what will his very presence be? If the pledges and first fruits of glory are so delightful, says Saint Jerome, what will glory itself be? If Jesus Christ is so sweet to those who follow him, says Saint Bernard, what can he be to those who possess him? Finally, says a certain scholar, if it is happiness

merely to hunger and thirst for justice, what must it be to be fully satisfied by it? A soul walking the path of virtue is so filled with joy that even the angels themselves are astonished by it: “Who is this who comes forth, overflowing with delights?” (Song of Songs 8). What, then, must be its final destination, if the road itself is so delightful?

Do not doubt it, my brothers: that destination is a place where every passion for pleasure is entirely satisfied, where the blessed are, as it were, intoxicated and submerged in a torrent of delight; where joy does not merely enter into man, who could never contain it, but where man himself enters into joy, as into a vast ocean in which he suffers the happiest of shipwrecks: “Enter into the joy” (Matthew 25); where, in short, joy is full and perfect. This full and perfect joy comes from the sight and the love of the sovereign good. It is impossible to see it without loving it, and impossible to love it without receiving from it an inexpressible pleasure. The blessed see it; they cherish it with a perfect love, free of every flaw. It is not blind, as our love is; they love what they see. It knows no languor; they possess what they love. It is not servile; self-love has no share in it. It is not inconstant; they love of necessity, for their freedom no longer has any further use. Whatever our modern innovators may say, God had indeed left them their freedom on earth; but not wishing to conquer them by the strength of his arm, he delights instead in triumphing through the beauty of his countenance. What happened to Moses happens also to the freedom of the blessed. That prophet led the Israelites all the way to the promised land, but died the very moment he beheld it. Freedom has led us to heaven; without it we would have no merit. But it does not enter heaven itself. The very moment it beholds the sovereign beauty of God, it is overcome, it grows faint, it swoons, it dies away. Judge, my brothers, of the love of the saints by these qualities; judge of their joy by this love, and tell me whether you do not believe that the passion for pleasure is fully satisfied by delights so enchanting.

You know, my brothers, that in the sea of this world, our hearts are ships tossed about by as many winds as we have desires. The saints, by contrast—O inestimable happiness!—rest upon a river of peace, upon an ocean of delight, and because no wind ever blows there, and no desire is ever formed there, they are ships that can never be shaken. I would gladly picture them, before I close, under the symbol of those ships which the illustrious Simon Maccabeus had carved upon the tomb of his brothers. He had these ships represented resting upon solid pillars, with weapons and trophies displayed close beside them (1 Maccabees 13). Why were these weapons placed outside the ships? Perhaps to signify that the blessed souls of these illustrious dead enjoyed a profound peace. But why place these ships upon pillars, if not to represent that these souls, resting upon the pillars of eternity, were ships that could never be shaken, and that the winds would trouble them no more—that is to say, that, fully satisfied with the goods of God, they would form no more desires.

O folly of mankind! O blind world! Senseless Christians, so perfect a happiness awaits you. It depends only on you to possess it, and yet you never think of it! "They held the desirable land as nothing" (Psalm 106). A sovereign empire is destined for you. You may enjoy it; and yet, ever enslaved to worldly goods, in love with the false pleasures of this world, you remain unmoved—like those coarse Israelites who wished to prefer a foreign land to the land of promise, because it was fertile and rich in pastures fit for fattening cattle: "This land is very rich for feeding cattle; we beg you to give it to us as a possession, and do not make us cross the Jordan" (Numbers 32). Unjust as you are, men of flesh and blood, you wish to remain in a foreign land because it is suited to nourishing animals, because it satisfies your carnal desires: "Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here?" (ibid.). What! Shall your brothers go into battle while you remain here at rest? Such was the wise reply Moses gave to those unjust Israelites, and it is the same reply I can give to so many cowardly Christians who complain of the harsh conditions imposed on

them for entering heaven and gaining that sovereign blessedness: “Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here?” Cowards that you are, your elder brothers, all those saints who now possess that sovereign blessedness, did they not have to fight against pain, persecution, hunger, thirst, sickness, nakedness, death, the cruelty of tyrants, and all the rage of hell, while you, occupied here below solely with fine living, with dwelling amid rich pastures, with satisfying your passions, with keeping a rebellious flesh in slothful ease, beg the Lord to excuse you from the labors and hardships it would take to cross the Jordan and enter the promised land?

Were these noble champions, who went before you into battle, stronger and more robust than you? Were they not subject to the same difficulties, the same passions, the same temptations, the same entanglements as you, made of the same flesh and bone as you are? Did not many of them have to break chains as strong, or stronger, than yours, to fight enemies as difficult, or more difficult, than yours? Why, then, should you not have the courage to do what they did? It was this very reflection that once turned a great sinner into a great saint—Saint Augustine himself. Will it prove fruitless for you today?

O blindness, exclaims Saint Gregory on this very point! O bewitchment! O madness! Men find nothing too difficult when it comes to ruining themselves and descending into hell; yet everything seems hard, impossible, impracticable, when it comes to saving themselves and rising to heaven—after so many examples of the contrary that we have before us in the saints.

Alas! Too eager for the acquisition of the world's contemptible goods, we grow listless and feeble when it comes to the sovereign goods of heaven. We toil and struggle even unto death for a fragile, passing glory, and yet, when an eternal one is offered to us, we find even the smallest efforts required for it unbearable! Once more I ask: do you not have the courage to do what so many others have done? And does not the reward promised you—the sovereign and

eternal good prepared for you—deserve these struggles and these fleeting pains? Even if it meant crossing a thousand mountains to obtain it, says Saint Chrysostome, even if it meant suffering a thousand deaths and the cruelest of torments to win it, nothing should hold us back, since it is the one sovereign good capable of perfectly satisfying our desires and making us happy throughout that eternity which I wish for you all. Amen.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME